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Life Experiences of Street Children in Bulawayo: Implications for Policy and Practice

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ABSTRACT

In the period between 2000 and 2015 much has been written about Zimbabwe's political and economic problems with very little mention of Zimbabwe's children, or indeed street children. In this study I explore the experience of street children in Zimbabwe's second largest city, Bulawayo. The study explores the work and activities that street children engage in as they negotiate their way through public and private spaces. A consideration is given to how the street children's need for space and their sense of place becomes part of an acquired identity that they establish through negotiation or imposition by others. Their experiences are presented in their words in order to capture who they are and how they navigate living on the margins of society; crossing physical as well as social and moral boundaries.

The study employed an ethnographic approach and was informed by the understanding of children as autonomous social actors. It explores some of the conceptual terrain necessary for a study of the life experiences of street children in Bulawayo in the context of their day to day activities and claims for space and places. Their image, journeys and how they project themselves into the future emerges from their interactions amongst themselves and their immediate environment. The study explores whether and how a child-centred model of practice would be possible to use in relation to street children and the implications for policy.

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ACRONYMS

ACRWC - African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of The Child

AIDS - Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome

CCJPZ- Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe

UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child

ESAP - Economic Structural Adjustment Programme

HIV - Human Immuno Virus /Human Immunodeficiency Virus

MDC-T - Movement for Democratic Change (Tsvangirai)

NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation

WHO - World Health Organisation

ZANLA - Zimbabwe National Liberation Army

ZANU (PF) Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front

ZAPU - Zimbabwe African People's Union

ZIPRA - Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army

UDI - Unilateral Declaration of Independence

UNICEF- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

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Chapter One: Introduction

'The moon is laughing at us,

The stars are weeping for us.

We had tried to reach for the sky

But we are sleeping on earth.

When we wake up darkness still looms all around us.

Our morning lies far beyond in the horizon'.

Source: Abid Merhti, from Poems by Street Children, Bombay, YUVA.

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the reasons behind the choice of Bulawayo as a location of study in addition to providing a justification for the study and an outline of the thesis structure. For the purpose of this study, the term 'street children' refers to boys and girls aged between ten and 18 years who have partially or completely severed family ties and use the streets as a place of work and home.

1.2 Justification for research

Part of the motivation for the study was the initial sense of a dearth of literature on street children in Bulawayo. Many studies on street children have focused on the causes and remedies to the phenomenon of street children rather than on the construction of the phenomenon itself (Hecht, 1998). The study was driven by a desire to examine the links within the street children's environment and to understand their interdependency. Thomas de Benitez (2011) postulates that there are missing links between laws, policies and interventions and children's realities. What sets this study apart from others is its emphasis

on children's agency and use of ethnographic research methods to capture the lived experiences of street children, positioned as active agents with a presence. In essence, the study is designed to locate street children and ask them about their life experiences and the daily struggle to survive in an urban environment in which their circumstances in some ways dictate and define their identity as well as their position in society.

The aim is to contribute to knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of street children in Bulawayo from the street children's point of view. It is hoped that this knowledge based on their life experiences will assist those working with street children to design interventions and formulate policies that would benefit them.

1.3 Research questions

The aim of this section is to reiterate the purpose of the study by expounding the research questions that the study addressed. The underpinning view in formulating research questions was influenced by Foucault's views that *'There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilisation, real places- places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society- which are something like counter sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality'* (Foucault 1986:24). The above statement encompasses the social world of street children.

Consequently, this study explored how street children negotiate the space and place they occupy in Bulawayo, the strategies that they employ to survive in an urban landscape designed for the money economy and also explored their future aspirations. An ethnographic research strategy guided by four related questions was designed with the aim to find out *what is going on* with street children on the streets of Bulawayo and what processes are at play (see Chapter Four). The literature review revealed gaps in knowledge

based on street children's accounts which present their unique perspective. Previous studies on street children in Bulawayo have looked at the demographics and reasons for being on the streets as well as activities that they engage in while they are living on the streets. The difference in this study is the engagement with the street children in the process of gaining insight and understanding of their lived experiences. This approach gives a face behind the statistics and the street children are shown as individuals in the sharing of their life stories as opposed to an adult-centred approach where children's views and wishes are accessed through adults or gatekeepers.

It was therefore important to focus on the realities of life on the streets in order to understand what can be drawn from these experiences that could be helpful in working with this group of disadvantaged children. It was with this in mind that the four questions (below) were formulated.

1. How do street children negotiate the spaces and places that they occupy in Bulawayo?
2. How do street children's concept of spaces and places shape the way in which they interact with their peers and their immediate surroundings?
3. What strategies do they adopt to claim spaces and places they live in?
4. To what extent do the life experiences of street children shape their identity and how are these identities constructed and contested?

The questions were designed to reveal the street children's personal experiences and what they think of their life journeys. Critical to the study were the factors that shaped their perceptions of places and spaces and their propensity to adopt certain strategies to survive on the streets of Bulawayo. Therefore, data on spaces and places was gathered; social interactions and relationships among street children and their immediate environment were observed and used to answer these questions. The research questions helped to closely

examine the life experiences of street children in Bulawayo in a manner that captured their lived experiences in their words. In other words the study captured the reality of street children's lives directly as lived and explained by them as they see or perceive their lives.

1.4 Background to the study

The background to this study is derived from my professional career as a social worker with children and families, first in Zimbabwe (12 years) and then in the United Kingdom (14 years). After qualifying as a social worker in Zimbabwe in 1987 I worked as a Social Worker in Bulawayo in 1988 followed by a five year stint at a rural outpost (Plumtree) in south western Zimbabwe before returning to the Bulawayo in 1995 to 2000. For the past 14 years I have worked as a social worker in the United Kingdom in the area of child protection. The two settings (Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom) are different in terms of practice and child protection standards. I found the United Kingdom's child protection systems more developed than Zimbabwe. That is not surprising as the two countries belong to two different economic spheres with Zimbabwe in the developing world and the former in the developed world. In my early years in the United Kingdom I soon realised that I was dealing with abuse prevention and deprivation which characterised many children who came to the attention of Social Services in Zimbabwe. In comparative terms the magnitude of deprivation is probably higher in Zimbabwe in that some children go without food, shelter and no access to education. This is different to the relative privilege of children in the United Kingdom where there is provision for poor families in the form of benefits and even free school meals.

The experience in the UK made me reflect on social work practice in Zimbabwe and the Child Protection system in place which was very minimal. The much publicized 'Every Child Matters' (2003) agenda of the Labour Government in 2000-2010 partly influenced my ideas about the research as I did not think one could apply it to Zimbabwe in the

current economic and socio-political environment. It was Prime Minister Tony Blair's foreword to the Green Paper (presented to Parliament in September 2003 by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury) which galvanized my thoughts about disadvantaged children. The foreword states that '*For most parents, our children are everything to us; our hopes, our ambitions, our future. Our children are cherished and loved*'. He goes on to say '*But sadly, some children are not so fortunate. Instead of joy, warmth and security of normal family life, these children's lives are filled with risk, fear and danger...*' (Every Child Matters, 2003). In my mind this seemed relevant to street children I had encountered while working as social worker in Bulawayo. I thought the question 'Does Every Child Matter?' could be asked in relation to children in Zimbabwe in general and to street children in particular.

A year after completing my Masters in Social Care degree with the University of Hertfordshire in 2006 (Dissertation title: How do social workers assess parents with learning disabilities whose children were on the at 'risk' register for reasons of neglect? The London Borough of Redbridge Experience), I felt I was equipped to embark on a research study of street children in Bulawayo. The qualitative research and advanced child protection modules (among other modules) provided a reasonable background to start research at a higher level. My research experience on parents with learning disabilities (a distinct group of parents) made the idea of research on the phenomenon of street children very attractive. Street children appeared to be on the margins as were parents with learning disabilities.

Based on my professional experience (though limited) of working with street children in the 1990s, I came to the conclusion that these were children at high risk of significant harm (a term embedded in child protection practice in the United Kingdom dating back to the Children Act 1989). Their unique life experiences needed exploring with a view of gaining a better understanding of who they are and what they do, an understanding I felt I did not

have during my brief time working with a few of them. They struck me as young people who defied all odds to master various survival skills away from home, school and parental guidance.

1.5 Professional encounters with street children

I had a few professional encounters with street children while working and living in Bulawayo in the 1990s. In 1997 I was involved in a head count of street children in Bulawayo where social workers from the Local Authority and members of the Bulawayo Task Force on Street Children walked down the streets observing street children and recording numbers. The identification was based on presence on the streets at a time around mid-morning and in the evening. With hindsight this was not thorough enough in that we missed their places and lacked an understanding of how street children functioned on the streets. However, the exercise marked preliminary efforts towards tackling the phenomenon of street children in Bulawayo.

1.6 Personal experiences with street children

I had three notable personal encounters in relation to street children in Bulawayo which were instrumental in my decision to study the phenomenon of street children there. In 1998 there was the tragic death of Dumi (a pseudonym) aged 12 who was a street child. He was involved in a road traffic accident on the way to Bulawayo from the resort town of Victoria Falls. Dumi and his family lived in the western suburbs of Bulawayo where I worked as the Area Social Worker. Dumi was a bright child but was not in school because his family circumstances meant that he had to accompany his parents to various places including travelling by train to places like Victoria Falls and other cities in Zimbabwe to help them beg for money (they relied on him to take them to various points around and outside the city). Begging was a way of supplementing the meagre benefits the family received from the Department of Social Welfare Public Assistance. Dumi became street wise and on

some days he would stay behind with other street children in town when his parents returned home. On this fateful occasion Dumi decided to stay behind in Victoria Falls with other street children from Bulawayo and later travelled in a truck which overturned on the journey and he died at the local hospital. On reflection, I came to realise that danger is always lurking around street children, hence my desire to understand their life experiences; if 'every child matters', to the powers that be maybe, such a tragic death could have been prevented.

It was common in Bulawayo to see street children loitering around food outlets, supermarkets or other public places in search for food and or money. I was, however, amazed one night in 1998 in the city centre when a young boy (about 12 years old) offered to guard my car against thieves for a small fee while I went into the cinema. The boy said the older boys would not break into the vehicle if he was on guard. I was intrigued that he could prevail over the older boys. On reflection, I realised that the young boy knew the dynamics of street life and was exploiting the opportunities that came his way but also that he could prevail over intruders to his 'territory'.

While working for Bulawayo City Council I was an active member of the Bulawayo Welfare Society which dealt with disadvantaged groups in the city including the homeless (street children included). I was, therefore, confronted with the plight of disadvantaged groups, hence I was drawn to street children as a group whose experiences are worthy of studying. It was clear at the time that some children experienced a different childhood of growing up on the streets and that was unfamiliar to me. The above encounters with street children stuck in my mind and helped me to formulate my ideas around the research group.

I chose Bulawayo as the research site because I was familiar with the environment on a personal and professional level. The Bulawayo City Council was part of the earlier efforts (with non-governmental organisations) through the Bulawayo Task Force on Street

Children to tackle the growing number of street children in the city in the late 1990s. Children living on the streets in Bulawayo have always been intriguing and a phenomenon which is alien to Ndebele traditions which I was part of by birth and residency in Bulawayo. The other reason for choosing the City of Bulawayo was because of its social, political and economic history and distinct traditions of a well-run city (Palmer, 1990; Mutizwa-Mangiza, 1991). This professional as well as personal interest was reinforced through reading about research into the lives of street children elsewhere; academic writing both at theoretical and practical level and the many concepts around childhood which is experienced differently in different places and times.

An ethnographic study of street children in Bulawayo was going to be interesting and unique in that their lived experiences were captured and presented in their own words. The study recognised the notion of children's social agency and hence followed child-centred research techniques to explore the phenomenon of street children in Bulawayo. It was also pertinent that a specific group of street children (those who live and work on the streets) were going to be the focus of the study because of their unique circumstances (spending all their time on the streets and using the street as both places of work and home).

1.7 Thesis structure

This thesis is organised into eight chapters, each with sub-sections focusing on various issues relevant to each chapter. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study as well as the justification for the research as detailed in the table of contents above. The research problem is briefly discussed as well as the research site and details of the background to the research are provided in this chapter. The chapter sets the stage for contextualizing the phenomenon under study; the phenomenon of street children, which is in itself a complex one whose solution appears to be elusive despite the street children's continued existence in many cities and towns around the world.

Chapter Two looks at the research setting (Bulawayo) and brings into focus the context within which the phenomenon of street children is explored. It brings to the forefront the trials and tribulations of Zimbabwe and in particular, Bulawayo as the host city to street children who are the focus of the study.

Chapter Three examines the literature on street children around the world and focuses on the social construction of childhood (and by extension the childhood of street children). The chapter also looks at how the phenomenon of street children has evolved over time and how it has been dealt with around the world and in Zimbabwe, casting an 'eye' on cultural influences, children's rights in Zimbabwe and theories around space and street children .

Chapter Four describes the methodological, theoretical and ethical considerations used to investigate the research questions. The chapter also provides a detailed account of research techniques and an assurance that appropriate procedures were followed to access the research sites and participants. Important issues like, sampling, gaining access, selection of participants, informed consent or dissent and issues of power are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Five provides an outline of methods used to investigate the phenomenon of street children. The chapter also covers data analysis starting with the analytical framework adopted and the processes followed in analysing data from interviews, observations and field visits. The chapter also highlights conditions on the ground and how these played out in the research process.

Chapter Six focuses on the demographics of participants with a view to describing who they are, where they come from, their numbers, ages, gender, levels of education and number of months or years spent living on the streets. The demographics help to locate street children and a partial picture emerges of who they are. Chapter Seven provides key findings presented from participants' perspectives. Chapter Eight provides a conclusion for

the study and also discusses the implications of this study for policy and practice, including the possibilities for a child-centred approach and suggests ideas for further research. The chapter concludes with final reflections on the study.

Chapter Two: Zimbabwe's Historical background

2.1 Introduction

In order to understand the phenomenon of street children in Bulawayo there is a need to locate Bulawayo in the overall map of Zimbabwe. The starting point is the history of the people of Zimbabwe and Bulawayo as the research site. Bulawayo as a research site is given prominence as the epicentre of street children's lived experiences and the creation of meaning in their complex childhoods. A study of street children would not, therefore, be complete without looking at the history of Zimbabwe and the colonial legacy which shaped how the country has come to its present state. The traditions and cultural practices feature in how life and society is structured, setting the scene to locate street children's life experiences within a set of circumstances and concepts that shape their lives on the streets. In this context street children are located at the heart of what goes on (on the streets of Bulawayo) and how this translates into their street identity, their interactions and their living conditions.

2.2 The history, politics and economics of Zimbabwe

This chapter will focus on those aspects relevant for understanding the research context and the lives of street children. The history, politics and economics of Zimbabwe provide a relevant context for how the phenomenon of street children has evolved. It is also relevant to the precarious conditions under which the study was conducted.

A great deal has been said and written about Zimbabwe's political and economic problems (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2002; Moyo, 2007; Masunungure and Badza, 2010). The history of Zimbabwe is characterised by the brutal and repressive colonial legacy (Mandaza and Raftopoulos, 2006; Moyo, 2007) which lasted for most of the twentieth century. Zimbabwe as it is today has gone through phases where power has changed hands. Historically, what is now Zimbabwe was part of the British Empire dating back to the overthrow of the

Ndebele Kingdom in 1893 and the renaming of the country to Southern Rhodesia, then Rhodesia in 1965 after the then Prime Minister Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (Watts, 2012). The respective colonial administrations prior to the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) were oppressive towards the indigenous people who were driven out of their land by the new settlers. Nyathi (2005) captured some first-hand traumatic experience of the brutality from evictees who 46 years later described how they were dumped into trucks and transported with their cattle to lands that were not so good for cattle farming. (Nyathi, 2005:44) argues that '*Following colonisation, the Ndebele people suffered land alienation and accompanying evictions more than any other African group in Zimbabwe*'. Chitiyo and Rupiya (2005) cite violent dispossession of fertile land, cattle theft and able-bodied men being coerced into offering their labour for non-payment. Politically, the local population was marginalised on the basis of race and property ownership in a new emerging cash economy.

After UDI the Smith regime was in revolt against Britain and was subsequently outlawed but not in the same way as the western anti-communist policy; rather a tolerated embarrassment. The Rhodesia Front government under Ian Smith faced unprecedented political unrest as the black majority resisted colonial rule which was based on the politics of conquest. Chitiyo and Rupiya (2005:331) state that the Smith government '*set about creating a formidable military machine aimed at crushing African aspirations for independence....*'.

During this period African nationalism gathered momentum with emerging political parties, mainly the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo and later the breakaway Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) championing the cause for the black majority. The two parties were to dominate the national political scene for years to come and waged ferocious guerrilla warfare against Ian Smith's Rhodesia Government through their military wings, Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army

(ZIPRA) under ZAPU and Zimbabwe National Liberation Army (ZANLA) under ZANU.

At the height of the war the country was named Zimbabwe-Rhodesia in 1978 in a short-lived internal settlement and finally independent Zimbabwe in 1980 following a British led peace settlement.

It is important to note that Rhodesia proved to be an important component in the west's fight against a communist influence in Africa. The main liberation movements, ZAPU and ZANU, had the support of the communist block of countries and newly independent African States. Events around the region also dictated the pace of events in Zimbabwe. Callinicos (1981: 14) writes that '*once Angola had been lost, western attention switched to Zimbabwe, where it was feared that the armed struggle, if continued, would lead to a social revolution and possibly, a confrontation between the super-powers*'. Masunungure and Badza (2010:207) sum up this argument by saying '*Rarely in history has so small a country attracted so much concentrated international attention as Zimbabwe in the last decade*'. This can be traced back to the birth of Zimbabwe where negotiations leading up to independence in 1980 involved the colonial power, Britain, the Commonwealth, the United States of America and the United Nations culminating in the Lancaster House negotiated settlement under the chairmanship of Lord Carrington.

2.3 Post-Independence

Zimbabwe attained independence from Britain on 18 April 1980 and the then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe struck a reconciliatory tone and won accolades from western countries that have a history of courting newcomers entering the world stage with financial packages of support. Zimbabwe embarked on a journey and promised good returns for its population and a promise of a democratic society. The then President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania is reported to have told Prime Minister Mugabe in 1980, '*You have inherited the jewel of Africa*' (<http://www.rhodesia.me.uk>). Figure 1 (p.14 of the thesis) depicts the

beauty of the country now known as Zimbabwe. Others like Onslow (2011) argue that the incoming ZANU-PF government in 1980 inherited not only the political economy of the white settler state but also the power of the colonial state and its repressive structures and ways of dealing with opposition and dissent including organizational structures of surveillance and control.

Figure1. Window on Rhodesia - the Jewel of Africa



Source: Rhodesian Archive of history and life in Rhodesia (www.rhodesia.me.uk)

At independence in 1980, under Robert Mugabe, Zimbabwe adopted a socialist policy outlook whilst maintaining a largely capitalist economy (Callinicos, 1981; Mbiba and Ndubiwa, 2006). In an interview, Robert Mugabe, then Prime Minister, said '*We would wish to be a government which is people-oriented, we work for the people and we serve the people. Socialism is our by-word*' (Callinicos, 1981:2). The newly independent state of Zimbabwe was set on a path to establish a one-party state although this never materialised (Sithole and Makumbe, 1997, Makumbe, 2011). Great efforts were made to exclude other political formations (for example ZAPU, and later the MDC and other small parties) with

party slogans, party regalia and songs given prominence at national celebrations such as Independence Day and Heroes Day (Kriger, 2005).

In the first decade after independence remarkable progress was made in education and health (Raftopoulos, 2004), smallholder food production (Rukuni and Eicher, 1984) and work for the black majority population. Zimbabwe's well developed infra-structure at independence satisfied great expectations for the newly independent state. The shortcomings of countries to the north were expected to serve as a warning for Zimbabwe to 'tread carefully' on the road to independence. The newly independent state became a torch bearer in the liberation of two of Southern Africa's last states (Namibia and South Africa) fighting for independence. Indeed, Zimbabwe played an important role in brokering peace in Mozambique and ending apartheid in Namibia and South Africa. However, these achievements were overshadowed by internal political strife that engulfed the country from 1998 with far reaching consequences.

2.4 The battle for supremacy after independence

ZANU (PF) emerged victorious in the first democratic elections in 1980 with 57 seats out of 100 + in the House of Assembly and their ZAPU counterparts getting only 20 seats (Matebeleland and the Midlands) with three seats going to Bishop Abel Muzorewa's African National Congress. There were twenty seats reserved for whites and all went to the Rhodesia Front of Ian Smith. Mandaza (1996) characterised the post-independence state of Zimbabwe as weak, lacking essence and suffering from being a hostage and dependent state. The newly independent state of Zimbabwe was thus vulnerable and struggled to address pressing issues like the land question which was topical and a driving force behind the nationalist struggle. It was also a divided country at independence (CCJPZ, 1999) with two liberation parties (ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU, also referred to in the thesis as ZAPU) competing for space and supremacy and also at risk of being undermined by the remnants

of the old order. The post-colonial state of Zimbabwe emerged from the brutal and oppressive settler regime of Ian Smith and a protracted and equally brutal armed struggle. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2002: 110) argues that the new government of Zimbabwe also '*inherited the colonial and violently repressive legal mechanism of the Rhodesian state, if not going even further*'. The international focus assumed prominence particularly in the last decade picking up on issues of governance and land distribution. The scene for a battle of political supremacy was set from then onwards. It was a bitter struggle which cost innocent lives, estimated in the region of 20 000 civilians in Matebeleland and the Midlands (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, 1999) at the hands of the Fifth Brigade whose recruits were mainly ZANU-PF cadres or supporters and trained by North Korean instructors. This operation was codenamed '*Gukurahundi*', a Shona word which loosely translated means '*The rain that washes away the chaff from the last harvest, before the spring rains*' (Rwafa, 2012:313). President Robert Mugabe later referred to this episode as a '*Moment of Madness*' (Daimon, 2002) without any elaboration as to what that meant.

The battle for supremacy ended with ZANU-PF triumphant with the signing of the Unity Accord with ZAPU in 1987 after a six year period of sustained and brutal persecution of its political opponents (ZAPU). ZAPU (also known as PF-ZAPU) joined ZANU-PF with Robert Mugabe assuming Presidency of the Party and the Executive Presidency of country. Mashingaidze (2005) argues that the 1987 Unity Accord was elitist in that it was signed by the political leaders and then sold at the grassroots level. Essentially it ended the conflict but did not bring reconciliation. The region of Matebeleland and Bulawayo (its industrial powerhouse) has suffered both politically and economically as very little development was devoted to the region since independence. One may be forgiven for postulating that the Unity Accord was lopsided and skewed in favour of ZANU-PF's agenda of a one party state.

The implications of this struggle for supremacy meant that ZANU-PF effectively ruled Zimbabwe uninterrupted from 1980 to 2008 (Sachikonye, 2012) before joining a Government of National Unity with the two Movement for Democratic Change formations in 2009. Sachikonye (2012:35) argues that '*ZANU-PF treats itself as a superior institution in governance vis-à-vis the cabinet, parliament and the public service*'. One can argue that the ZANU-PF way of doing politics is that opponents or dissenting voices are dealt with ruthlessly. This can be evidenced in pronouncements made at the top of government. Kriger (2005:10) quotes then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe advising his supporters after the 1985 election to '*Go and weed the weeds from your garden*'. In the same period, while addressing a rally in the dormitory town of Chitungwiza, Mugabe reportedly said '*... it is now time to strike the bushes in the fields with your clubs... take the rotten pumpkins out of the patch*'. Subsequently opposition supporters (ZAPU) were attacked at their homes, their properties taken and declared ZANU (PF) property. Police were reportedly instructed not to intervene with the perpetrators of such violence. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2002) mentions a public pronouncement by President Mugabe that some of them have degrees in violence in reference to election violence.

The year 2013 saw another disputed election with a ZANU (PF) landslide victory of 61 per cent of votes in the July 2013 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections. One commentator, Rutherford (2013) suggests that this was an unexpected electoral result and reportedly surprised many, even on the victorious side, especially the margin of victory. The opposition parties cried foul and pointed to widespread electoral irregularities. Once again the President unleashed veiled threats a few days after his inauguration to residents of the two major cities for voting for the opposition. He is reported to have said, '*People from Harare and Bulawayo, to vote for the MDC-T, what you admire in that party? Now, go and get from the MDC-T what you were promised during the elections*' as well as describing MDC-T leaders as '*ignoramuses*' (Bulawayo24News, 25 August 2013).

By the end of 2014 the Zimbabwean economy showed signs of a slow meltdown and *'heads into 2015 in a rather fragile state'* (Sunday News, 21 December, 2014). Politically, ZANU (PF) seems even more powerful than ever at the time of writing.

2.5 Zimbabwe: Demographics

In order to locate the study and research site it is necessary to look at the country's demographics as these play an important role in understanding the dynamics around the research participants in terms of their backgrounds. The Census 2012 National Report put Zimbabwe's total population at 13 061 239 million. This figure does not include about four million Zimbabweans scattered all over the world of whom two to three million are believed to be living in South Africa and with the rest spread across Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Mail and Guardian, 19 April 2013). Most of the population in the diaspora left Zimbabwe at the height of the economic and political meltdown which picked up momentum in 2000 with the infamous land invasions when images of chaos, destruction and violence dominated the media signifying a story of collapse and catastrophe (Marongwe *et al.*, 2011).

The population of Zimbabwe is relatively young with 41 per cent below 15 years while four per cent are aged 65 years and above. Those described as economically active account for 58.7 per cent of the total population (Census 2012 National Report). According to Erica Keogh of the Statistics Department, University of Zimbabwe, *'The economically active population is those available for the production of goods and services i.e. the labour force. The activity rate is the proportion of economically active persons, among the whole population-it thus measures the participation of a population in the labour force'* (uzweb/uz.ac.zw/science/math/zimaths/51/ERICA.htm). The Central Statistics Office uses internationally recognised standards and conventions for defining economic activity and unemployment. In this case one can assume that children living on the streets are in the

economically active population yet for all intent and purposes they may not feature in the statistics. The unemployment rate is put at 11 per cent. This group comprises a proportion of the economically active population that is unemployed and actively looking for employment.

According to Census 2012 figures Zimbabwe had a total of 1 695 647 children aged 10-14 years and three per cent of this group were economically active with 44 per cent working as unpaid family workers and 20 per cent in paid employment. The majority of the population, 67 per cent, resides in the rural areas. Only 33 per cent of the population lives in urban areas. Today, Zimbabwe has ten administrative provinces with Bulawayo and Harare regarded as provinces, all marked in red bold letters (See Map 1, page 20 of the thesis). Areas marked in black are districts (rural areas) where the majority of the population (67%) lives. The majority of the urban population has a rural home or has their roots in the rural areas. The cities tend to be seen as places of work and it is common for those with rural roots to retire to the rural areas at the end of their working lives. The provinces carry a regional identity, culture and language. For example, being Ndebele or Shona carries linguistic connotations, that is, speaking the respective language as one's mother tongue (Kriger, 2005) and one's identity and culture (in most cases based on regional origin). The regional implications can be seen from the map below with the provinces assuming names which are language oriented. For example, Matabeleland has Ndebele as the dominant language while Shona is dominant in Mashonaland, Manicaland and Masvingo provinces within the Midlands having both Ndebele and Shona.

Map 1. Map of Zimbabwe showing 10 administrative provinces and major cities



Source; <http://mapsofworld.com/zimbabwe/maps/zimbabwe-political-map.jpg>

2.6 Zimbabwe on the brink

To many people outside the country, the State of Zimbabwe represents a failed state in the hands of an aging dictator. In the western world the mere mention of the name Zimbabwe raises interesting questions ,especially from those who follow the press coverage of the nation once held as a '*Jewel of Africa*' or the '*Bread Basket*' of the Southern African Development Community.

Bond and Manyanya (2002) argue that Zimbabwe's economic problems from the 1980s were characterised by contradictions which were further compounded by inequitable land distribution, old industrial equipment and production methods that could not compete in the emerging global market. The signs of economic decline were evident from the mid-1980s and in response the government turned to the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) adopted in 1991(Bond and Manyanya, 2002), whose main aim was to

open up the economy and reduce government expenditure among other targets. There was relative success in the tourism sector while, by and large, there was a rapid decline in income and the country became less equal (Mbiba and Ndubiwa, 2006). Zimbabwe fell out with the western world, mainly the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the bulk of Europe (Mbiba and Ndubiwa, 2006), following what has been seen by many as a chaotic land re-distribution programme and economic policies as well as human rights abuses.

However, an equally cogent argument can be presented that the state of Zimbabwe today is a result of a bitter colonial legacy where seeds of discontent were sown through the inequitable distribution of land dating back to the demise of King Lobengula in 1893. The land question remains the rallying cry for many people in Zimbabwe and thus the 'prize' for independence was a fairer distribution of land. The negotiated 'sunset clauses' in the Lancaster House Agreement led to Zimbabwe's white commercial farmers being protected from the government's land acquisition programme for the first ten years (Palmer, 1990) based on a 'willing buyer, willing seller' basis. The implication of this was that no meaningful land distribution took place and hence the unfinished business of the Lancaster House Agreement, has come back to haunt the country and its leaders.

Zimbabwe became and has remained a humanitarian crisis for over a decade. Political strife and the lack of democracy have claimed many victims. HIV/AIDS has wreaked havoc amongst the population with 1.3 million AIDS orphans in 2010 and 50 000 child-headed households (The National AIDS Council Report, 2009). A report published by the Zimbabwe Senate in 2011 stated that there were 1.5 million HIV positive individuals in the age group of 15 to 19 years (The First Report of the Senate Thematic Committee, 2011). German (2005) concluded in his study that there were thousands of orphans and 'child headed' households in existence in the country. However, the rate of infection seems to have gone down significantly from 33 per cent in 1999 to 13.7 per cent in 2009. A glimpse

of hope came about with the formation of the Government of National Unity in March 2009 but attempts to correct the historical injustices continue to haunt those in power. For many inside and outside Zimbabwe, independence brought about short-lived euphoria and then misery.

2.7 The Setting: Bulawayo (history)

In the same way as Zimbabwe can only be properly understood by reference to its history, Bulawayo's specific history cannot be divorced from that of the vast province of Matabeleland and its place as the epicentre of the Ndebele Kingdom organised through the militarist structure of the mighty Zulu Kingdom of the early nineteenth century.

Bulawayo's modern history can, thus, be traced to the late nineteenth century beginnings of the Ndebele settlement of grass-thatched huts. Bulawayo grew to be the commercial hub of the country and the regional city it is today (Hamilton and Ndubiwa, 1994).

Figure 2. King Lobengula's court in session in his capital of Bulawayo (pre-1893).



Source: <http://mthwakazinationparty.wozaonline.co.za/About>

Bulawayo is the second largest city in Zimbabwe and is located in the south-western part of the country. It is situated in the *heart* of the vast region of Matabeleland (mainly referred to as Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South Provinces respectively). The city is home to the ethnic Ndebele people some of whom migrated from Zululand in the early 1820s reaching Zimbabwe in the late 1830s. Arnold and Eveleigh (2001) described Bulawayo as laid back in a way that Harare, the country's political and economic centre is not, and it remains slightly wary of its slicker sibling. However, there have been drastic structural changes in the traditional lifestyle as result of modernisation as evidenced in the pictures of the traditional village in the 1890s compared to what it looks like today (Figures 2, 3 and 4).

Figure 3. A traditional homestead in Matabeleland



2.8 Present day Bulawayo

It is a gateway to Botswana, South Africa, Mozambique, and Zambia and further afield countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia and Angola. It is endowed with

roads, rail and air links to the region and important tourist resorts. Its hinterland (in places like the Matopo Hills, the Gwaai catchment, the Shangani area and Khami Ruins) is a depository of Zimbabwe's history of violence, struggle and pride. The city is renowned for its colonial style buildings (Like the City Hall which is the equivalent of a Civic Centre in the United Kingdom) and wide roads designed for a span of oxen to turn.

Figure 4: Present day Bulawayo



Source: <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=bulawayo+city&rlz=1C1TEUA>

The above picture shows the grid plan of what is the city centre. On the far left of the picture is the city's industrial site as evidenced by 'Rising Smoke' (*KoNtuthuziyathungqa*). Among its famous building are the National Railways of Zimbabwe Headquarters (the tallest building in the picture) and the City Hall (Figure 5). Further to the west of the city are the western suburbs (*Emalokitshini*) and to the east are the low density residential areas. The implications of this set up will be explored further in the next section and its

relevance to the study of street children will then become clearer. Bulawayo's transport links with other cities makes travelling to and from Bulawayo much easier by road or rail.

Figure 5: Bulawayo City Hall



Source:<http://www.hornung-park-lodge.com/bulawayo/>

2.9 Population distribution in Bulawayo

The National Census of 2012 posted the population of Bulawayo as 653 337 out of a total population in Zimbabwe of 13 061 239 (Census Provincial Report 2012). Of this figure 303 346 (46 per cent) were males and 349 991 (54 per cent) were females. This figure is lower than Harare's population of 2 123 132. With regards to Bulawayo, the Census 2012 observed the population of Bulawayo to be relatively young with 34 per cent aged below 15 years and those aged 65 years and above slightly above 3 per cent of the city's population. Ten per cent of the population aged 3-34 years had never been to school while 58 per cent were observed to be attending school with 32 per cent recorded as having left school. The statistics indicated that 98 per cent of the population is of African origin and 2

per cent of the population is of European, Asiatic and mixed origin. The overwhelming majority of the population (99 per cent) held Zimbabwean citizenship. The literacy rate was a remarkable 96 per cent with males having a higher literacy rate than women.

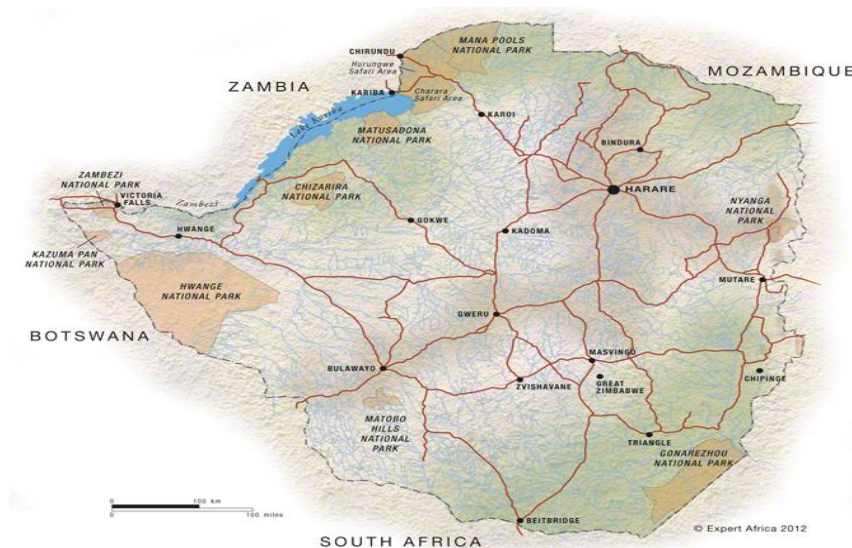
One important feature of Bulawayo is its site plan mapping the landscapes of Bulawayo city and its Locations representing 'white and black' respectively (Ranger, 2010). The area east of the city centre used to be a 'white' dominated area. The word Locations (*Emalokitshini*) denotes residential areas west of the city centre (also known as townships). The areas were mapped according to the grid layout similar to European towns with its frontier streets marking the eastern and western borders, the east being home to the settler civilization and the west (Locations) to barbarism (Ranger, 2010). In essence this meant that whites lived in 'European' areas and blacks lived in African areas (Germann, 2005). The post-independence black elite replaced most of the privileged white population in the eastern areas. The locations or townships are home to low-income families while low density areas (the eastern suburbs) are for high-income groups (Rutherford, 2013). The locations have never been home to the white elites. The Census 2012 figures show that about 6.5 per cent of the population resides in the low density areas and about 93.5 per cent reside in high density areas. It, therefore, follows that the use of urban space in Bulawayo is closely related to one's socio-economic status. This aspect of the use of urban space is relevant to street children which is one of the concerns of this study. The colonial legacy left a long lasting effect on how the city's populations live and left a distinct class structure that has continued to survive 34 years after independence. Children in the low density areas attend well equipped schools while those in the high density areas attend poorly equipped schools.

2.10 Bulawayo's economic and political status in Zimbabwe

Bulawayo contains much of what remains of the country's heavy industries and food processing capacity after the economic meltdown of the last two decades. Up until the early 1990s, before the Economic Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAP) of 1991 (Mbiba and Ndubiwa, 2006), Bulawayo boasted a diverse industrial base and comprehensive engineering industry, including textiles, radio manufacturing (the largest in Africa at its peak), a vibrant tyre factory (Dunlop), hides and meat processing including a giant Cold Storage facility and electricity power station. Bulawayo earned the nickname '*koNtuthuziyathungqa*' (The Place of Rising Smoke) because of the fumes from the strong industrial base.

Among other facilities Bulawayo has two major hospitals and clinics dotted around the western suburbs, two universities, one of them specialising in Science and Technology and the other specialising in agriculture and humanities as well as being home to the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair where the country can showcase its industries to the world on a yearly basis.

Map 2. Map of Zimbabwe showing Bulawayo and other major urban centres



Source: <http://www.expertafrica.com/zimbabwe/reference-map>

The city of Bulawayo retains its high degree of political, administrative autonomy, a reputation for good governance and working in partnership with business, workers and residents (Mangiza-Mutizwa, 1991; Mbiba and Ndubiwa, 2006). It is worth noting that Bulawayo has somehow attained the status of *home* to the ruling party's political opponents since Independence in 1980. Bulawayo was a ZAPU stronghold before and after independence while the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has controlled the city since 2000 (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa, 2000) taking all eight parliamentary seats and the MDC-T repeated the feat in 2013 sweeping all ten parliamentary seats and all 29 wards in council elections (The Chronicle, August 6, 2013). Bulawayo has, thus, been at the centre of opposition politics and also bore the brunt of Gukurahundi massacres like the vast region of Matabeleland and the Midlands between 1983 -1987 (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, 1999). One can argue that the present day city of Bulawayo still carries the mantle for being the *place of the persecuted* and this is found in the *groaning* of the people from the region of Matabeleland who feel marginalised by the post-independence government of ZANU (PF). This argument is summed up by Mhlanga (2013:57) quoting Moyo (2010), '*the Ndebele still continue to feel marginalised and to perceive of themselves as subjects in a bifurcated state*'. Mhlanga goes on to say that '*this has been aggravated by the state's continued marginalisation of Matabeleland as a region not only in terms of development but also within its cultural phanerons whose intention is to engrave in the tablet of time the feeling and stature of inferiority*'.

Like any other city in Zimbabwe over the past decade, there has been a collapse of services in general and flight of capital/disinvestment in Bulawayo. The once well-run Bulawayo City Council is struggling to meet its obligations. Business investment has all but disappeared in the city and many firms have relocated to the more influential capital, Harare. The dimensions of the present day problems facing the city are far beyond the

control of Bulawayo City Council and lie deep in the political and economic fabric of Zimbabwe, both historical and post-independence developments that have shaped the current state of affairs. Although declining in the commercial sphere, Bulawayo retains its position at the epicentre of Zimbabwean opposition politics and it is widely believed that whoever carries the Matabeleland vote will influence the balance of power in Harare.

2.11 Bulawayo: A city surviving

Over the last decade or so Bulawayo has experienced economic decline which gripped the country in the face of what many commentators described as self-inflicted failed policies backed by denials on the part of the national government (Moyo, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2002). Moyo (2007:117) sums up Bulawayo as *'Now a city ailing in all socio-economic areas...has certainly fallen victim to the national economic crisis, but despite that, it remains busy with creativity and initiatives by individuals to save their lives and create opportunities for themselves and their children'*. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2002:100) argues that there has been a serious crisis of governance which *'gave birth to a political, economic, social, ideological and humanitarian crisis'*. It is also true that the colonial legacy is partly to blame for structural problems that have bedeviled post-colonial African states. Further threats to Bulawayo's sustainability are the national economic conditions described elsewhere in this study as well as the HIV and AIDS epidemic (Bulawayo City, 2000) that has put a strain on household and enterprise economies.

2.12 The changing face of the streets of Bulawayo.

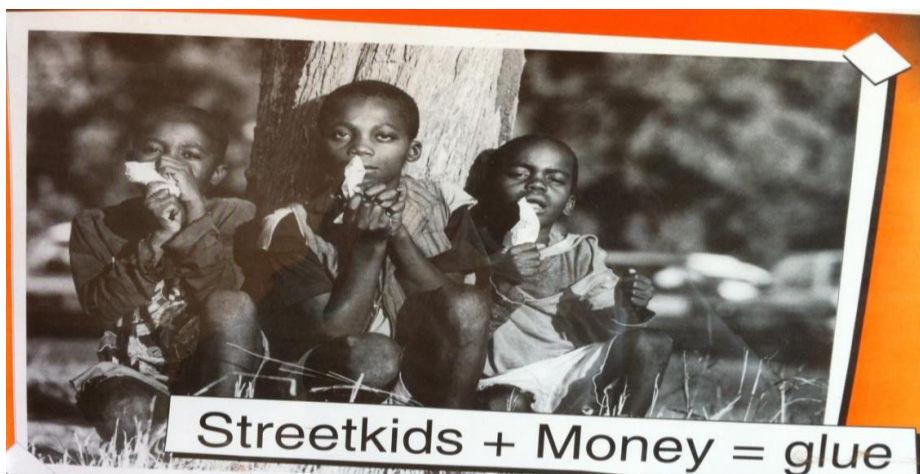
Nelson Mandela said, at the launch of the Blue Train at Worcester Train Station in South Africa (September 27, 1997), *'The true character of a society is revealed in how it treats its children'*. This should be relevant for those children living on the margins such as street children in Bulawayo. In order to unpick the life experiences of street children in Bulawayo one needs to examine the way of life in the past and the present and thus

capture the core traditional values, norms and cultural practices that govern childhood.

Zimbabwe, as it is today, has seen a transformation from an agrarian society prior to 1893 to modern Zimbabwe where modernization has changed some of the traditional structures that dominated family life. For example the colonial administration brought about the concept of city life and working for a wage starting with adult males.

The 1990s saw a sudden influx of children coming onto the streets of Bulawayo and other major towns and cities in Zimbabwe to help families supplement their incomes by selling wares and with some ending up staying on the streets (DSW, 1998). This caught many people by surprise as this was a post-independence phenomenon. Prior to independence the Local Government administration had strict by-laws with regards to people living in the cities and anyone living on the streets would be in trouble with law enforcement agencies. These by-laws were relaxed after independence and residents could be found in the Commercial Business District selling their wares on the pavements. It was not surprising that there were no strategies to deal with this homelessness among children. Soon children living on the streets began to attract media headlines (see Figure 6 below). It was common to find children moving between towns and cities and social workers at the Department of Social Welfare were tasked to find out their backgrounds and work out plans to return them to their parents. The children were placed in designated places of safety, usually Children's Homes, while social workers traced their parents or guardians.

Figure 6. Media perception of street children *Source: The Chronicle, January 1991*).



2.13 Concluding remarks

Bulawayo has a rich history and culture and occupies an important place in the fabric of Zimbabwean society. From its humble beginnings it became the industrial hub of the colonial state and the bastion of national and opposition politics before and after independence in 1980. In this chapter I have described Bulawayo as a great city endowed with a potential to attract people and resources due to the city's geographical location and the links to major routes to the hinterland.

As evidenced in Chapter Two (figures 2 to 5) there has been a remarkable change of traditional structures to what are now modern towns and cities while the rural areas have lagged behind in terms of infrastructure and advancement seen in the urban areas. This is perhaps a result of what Lipton (1977) referred to as the '*urban bias*' in economic development which is characterised by spatial differences or inequalities in poverty between urban and rural areas, with the consequential conflict between the rural and urban classes which was largely an overriding source of struggle in poor countries. Indeed the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe was based on the unequal distribution of land which eclipsed even the well-articulated conflicts between labour and capital, and between foreign and national interests. The colonial legacy and modernisation have changed the face of the streets of Bulawayo and street children have become part of the landscape worth studying. The background information in this chapter paves the way to explore further the position of children and street children in the context of the traditions and cultural influences that shape life on the streets of Bulawayo.

Chapter Three: Literature review

3.1 Introduction

Having explained the thinking behind the research topic in Chapter One and the socio-economic and political background of the research setting in Chapter Two, this chapter begins by setting out the theoretical perspective of the thesis through an in-depth examination of childhood and the conceptualisation of the phenomenon of street children.

Opposing concepts of the child have dominated the study of children. On the one hand, young people are considered to be born (and remain) ‘innocent’, and therefore need to be protected from the potential negative impacts of society. On the other they need to be both controlled and nurtured lest they perish from a natural state, alluded to in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954) as innately destructive. The phenomenon of street children is in itself a social construction (de Benitez, 2007) and hence cannot be divorced from theories of childhood, identity and marginalization. The definition of ‘street children’ is examined in detail and studies around the world are discussed and finally focusing on studies relating to street children in Bulawayo. Theorising space and place and marginal identifies is important to locate the research questions for the study.

3.2 The social construction of childhood

Jenks (1996:7) states that ‘*Childhood is to be understood as a social construct, it makes reference to a social status delineated by boundaries that vary through time and from society but which are incorporated within the structure and thus manifested through and formative of certain typical forms of conduct. Childhood then always relates to a particular cultural setting*’. It is widely accepted that childhood is not, at all, the same in different times and places (Maynard and Thomas, 2004).

In sociology, childhood has, since Ariès (1965), been understood as a social and cultural construction influenced by large scale historical forces. Ariès (1965) saw childhood not as a distinct phase of life and noted that in the middle ages a child was regarded as a small adult as soon as he or she was weaned. There were some aspects attributed to being a child during that period such as mingling, playing and competing for work with adults. There was a gradual process of separating adults and children as new family attitudes around the child and his education developed. Others like Boyden and Holden (1991) argue that childhood is largely an invention and a concept that developed gradually with increasing industrialisation in twentieth century Europe. According to King (2007:372), Ariès' major contribution to the debate on childhood was that *'childhood was not an essential condition, a constant across time but something that changed or, if childhood itself, bound by biologically or psychologically determined phases of development, is constant, then the understanding of it differed, as did the way it was experienced by both adults and children'*.

Ariès' claims about the history of childhood have been disputed by De Mause (1974) who argued that the assertion that the history of childhood was a recent phenomenon was wrong. De Mause countered the assertion by identifying what he referred to as *'periodization of modes'* of parent-child relations going back as the Infanticide Mode in the fourth century A.D. up to the ultimate mode at the beginning of mid-twentieth century which he calls the Helping Mode. In a 1998 speech at the National Parenting Conference in Colorado, De Mause remarked that *'history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to waken'* (De Mause, 1998). The diagram below provides a summarized version of the modes as seen by De Mause.

Table 1: A summary of De Mause's *History of Childhood*.

Periodization of mode	Period
Infanticide Mode	4 th Century A.D.
Abandonment Mode	4 th -13 th Century A.D.
Ambivalent Mode	14 th -17 th Century A.D.
Inclusive Mode	18 th Century A.D.
Socialisation Mode	19 th Century A.D. Mid-20 th Century A.D.
Helping Mode	Beginning Mid-20 th Century

This captures how childhood was viewed over the last centuries in the western world. It provides an understanding of childhood in time and history where different views about the child's place and space were held.

However, Pollock (1983) criticised Ariès and his co-thinkers (including De Mause) and firmly rejects the idea that childhood did not exist in medieval times. Pollock is critical of their methodologies and the conclusions drawn from evidence. Pollock suggests that the focus should be on actual parent-child relationships in history rather than generalized ideas about sentiments. Acknowledging that there was cruel and brutal child discipline practices in history, Pollock argues that these were by no means the norm and these were mentioned by writers condemning them as undesirable extremes. It is therefore better, says Pollock, to study what people actually did and what their experiences were like. This analogy is helpful in a study of street children's experiences in that it aims to capture the street children's experiences at various stages of their lives.

There are contemporary academics like Woodhead (2006) who identified at least four perspectives on early childhood. The first was that which could be traced back as far as Plato (428-348) where children were regarded as tender when any impressions chosen and

made leave a permanent mark (Clarke and Clarke (2000). This has influenced western psychologists who adopt a vision of childhood that is largely dependent on child development theory for which Piaget is considered a key figure (Jenkins, 1996). The view from this perspective is that *'early childhood is the period when humans are most dependent on secure and responsive relationships with others (adults, siblings and peers) for survival, emotional security, social integration and cognitive and cultural competencies'* (Woodhead, 2006:7). The second perspective is the political and economic perspective which focuses on improving the conditions of the poor in order to make independent human beings (Woodhead, 2006). The third perspective is the social and cultural perspective which recognises that development and learning are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts. Woodhead criticises taken-for- granted western cultural traditions based on descriptions of what children do and what they need. In other words, the argument is that their childhood should be culturally specific while acknowledging common physical aspects. Woodhead's fourth perspective is the human rights perspective which is based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which requires that children should be respected as persons in their own right. The human rights perspective is 'child-centred' or 'child-focused' and demands that children are participants in research and development of services for children (Montgomery, 2009).

James and James (2004) see childhood as a social space which is structurally determined by a range of social institutions and mechanisms including law, social policy and the family. These combine to provide intergenerational continuity to the nature and dimensions of social space. In any given society, it is this unique combination of political, economic, social and cultural forces that constitute the cultural politics of childhood. Holloway and Valentine (2009) and Wells (2009) add another important dimension in that they argue that where children live will shape their experience of the world and the expectations placed on

them. Wells argues that whatever perspective of childhood (historical, spatial or social) is emphasised, the concept of childhood is shaped by external factors to the child. There are marked differences as to how childhood is defined in various regions around the world. There are, therefore, multitudes of childhoods and there is no universal definition or accepted set of responsibilities linking parents, children and their wider society (Panter-Brick, 2000). The issues of class and gender are an integral part of how childhood is perceived in various societies and this applies to street children. In many countries there is an age of majority when childhood ends and the individual becomes an adult and the most common age is between 12 and 21 (Feeny and Boyden, 2004). There is, however, great variability around the world in relation to a range of issues: what age you can drink alcohol at, vote, get married, and are liable for prosecution, and so on.

In the western world many people have a concept of childhood based on notions of children as innocent and in need of constant attention (Aptekar, 2000). The child should be happy, healthy, achieve and enjoy their experience of life which resonates with Every Child Matters (2003) which was government policy from 2004 until a change of government in 2010, in the United Kingdom. The model of childhood that is encoded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) follows a Western discourse of childhood as a time of play, innocence and learning (Wells, 2009) and, therefore, postulates a global childhood (James and James, 2009). Article 12 of the UNCRC recognises a child as capable of forming their own views and the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them and further that these should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child concerned. The UNCRC is often criticised for lacking means to foster the legal rights of children and what is in the best interests of any child (Kohm, 2009) and the lack of an enforcement mechanism to ensure and guarantee the principle of children's rights (Bessler, 2008). In practice it can

only censure signatories. This point will be revisited in later sections on actions of the government of Zimbabwe in relation to street children.

The global view of children based on the Western discourse of childhood cannot be applied to all situations without recognising or taking into account local conditions. While it may be true that such a concept of childhood may exist in some cultures it cannot be applied across cultures as it is widely accepted that there are indeed different childhoods and that children experience childhood differently even if living in the same country and the same neighbourhood. For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child classification of all individuals under the age of 18 as ‘children’ has no social meaning in many parts of the world as children are viewed by their parents, peers and societies in many ways that sometimes cut across age. These age definitions detract from a proper understanding of some groups of children globally, and such constructions have an impact on policy and practice.

An excursion into the world of social construction is necessary in order to understand *street children* as a socially constructed category (Thomas Benitez, 2008). A key feature of social construction relates to the extent which the focus of practice and meanings tends to vary across space and time. A useful approach to social construction is through the work of Burr and Gergen. Burr (1995) describes the aim of social construction as to account for the ways in which phenomena are constructed in different contexts and by different means and seeks to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the creation of their perceived social realities. This involves looking at ways in which social phenomena are created, institutionalised and made into tradition by humans. The socially constructed reality is seen as an on-going process which is reproduced by people acting on their interpretations and their knowledge. Gergen (1999), like Burr, suggests that for any set of circumstances there are an unlimited number of descriptions or explanations. Gergen’s main argument is that the way we see a situation depends on our view of the world and the

language we use to describe it. It can be argued that language is important in the social construction of street children as the names they are known by or called around the world often lead to how they are perceived and treated.

Ward (1990:1) quotes a famous essay '*On Memory and Childhood Amnesia*' by Ernest Schachtel who states that the '*Adult is usually not capable of experiencing what the child experiences; more often than not he is not even capable of imagining what the child experiences. It is not surprising, then, that he should be incapable of recalling his own childhood experiences since his whole mode of experience has changed*'. In view of the above, it can be argued that childhood is socially constructed and that children's lives are therefore shaped by these constructions regardless of whether it is in terms of conforming or resisting what the society and culture dictates. Developmentalist constructions of childhood- derived from work in psychology in the first half of twentieth century- have shaped perceptions of a 'normal' childhood. Woodhead's work on global childhoods and culture notes that a particular focus on work has been seen as inimical to a good childhood in the West/North, but not in the global South. O'Dell and Leverett (2010:6) raise an important argument that '*positioning a child as dependent and vulnerable does not fully address the lived experiences of children and young people*'. It is, therefore, important for a study involving children to adopt a position that would enable the appreciation of their perspectives and recognise their exercise of agency.

3.3 The social construction of street children

The social construction of childhood can create a problematic picture of street children as alien to 'normal' mainstream society. Thus, in some literature and the varied attempts to classify street children, is embedded the characterisation or categorisation of the individual street child that reflects the concept of a socially isolated and alienated '*street society*' (De Moura, 2002; Ennew, 1989). Dallape (1989) argues that emphasis is on the deficient

conditions of street life while basic rights of food, shelter and education are violated.

Others place emphasis on deficient characteristics of the children themselves by portraying them as different from those who live at home (Cosgrove, 1990); seeing street children as having a culture of their own or what Lusk (1992:297) called the '*street society*' where they surrender to the temptations of the street (Campos et al, 1994 : 327).

Work in the field of childhood studies (see for example McNamee, 2000) suggests that whilst there is a need to claim a 'conceptual space' for the term childhood, it is by no means a homogenous term. McNamee (2000) further reiterates the view of James *et al* (1998: 38) that the '*central issue to be explored in relation to childhood space ... is that of control*' (and one might add power). Whilst the argument is that the use of '*heterotopic space*' can be a useful conceptual metaphor for childhood, the concept of heterotopic space may also be usefully applied in the physical sense of space that constitutes the 'street' part of street children.

Foucault's concept of heterotopic space is essentially a place of the 'other'. He describes these real places as counter sites which are outside of all other places even though their location can be found in reality within, what he later refers to as, 'geographical markers' (Foucault 1986:25). Importantly, these spaces can be where 'deviants' are placed or place themselves and may in many cases require certain gestures or permissions to enter them. Foucault described heterotopias as spaces of compensation, in other words, space which the 'other' can escape to. The social construction of these spaces may be as important as the social construction of identities as a way that these children negotiate who they are and how they will survive. Similar trends are found in Auyero and Burbano de Lara's (2012) description of strategies that local people devise to avoid harm, the ways they use public space to avoid certain areas in the poor neighbourhood of Buenos Aires.

The social construction of childhood and street children may prompt interventions which sustain the status quo of social inequalities. Thus punitive policies and practices in many parts of the world can be attributed to the negative presentation of street children and young people who commit crime (Goldson, 2000). A departure from the above is that within the context of rapid urbanisation, unemployment and poverty, street children often make pragmatic and sensible decisions to use the street as a means of dealing with and moving away from lives of poverty and abuse. They adopt an opportunistic approach to their situation and view the street as a road to self-determination and self-advancement. There is weight in Bourdillon's (2001) assertion that to street children living and working on the streets is not a problem but a way of addressing their daily struggles to survive. It is interesting that Swart (1990) found that street children's networks in South Africa provided a high enough degree of social support to be characterised as 'pseudo-families'. These exist within the context of the individual supporting themselves financially amid the friendships on the streets (Kidd and Kral, 2002).

3.4 The concept of childhood in the African context

'It takes a village to raise a child' - old African Proverb

It is important to take a closer look at the concept of childhood in the African context. Africa is, as a continent, characterised by multiple childhoods ranging from the Xhosa and Zulu in South Africa, the Ndebele and the Shona in Zimbabwe, to the Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa in West Africa, and in Eastern Africa the Somali as well as the Kikuyu in Kenya and the Chewa of Malawi. The old African proverb above suggests that raising a child is a communal effort and this reflects a social reality I recognise from my own childhood in rural Zimbabwe and can relate to. Loosely explained the responsibility of raising child was in traditional Zimbabwean society a shared responsibility involving members of the extended family (older children, aunts and uncles, grandparents and many others). It many

respects one could argue that (oral) traditions dominated the concept of childhood in many African societies. For example, a child's welfare and conduct was the concern of everybody in the community and adults could discipline a child for misconduct and the parents would further punish the child if a report was made to them.

Philippe Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood* (1965) and Claude Meillassoux's anthropological investigations (<http://www.faqs.org/childhood/A-Ar/Africa.html>) into sub-Saharan Africa provided an insight into African childhoods. Others like Wilson (1977) distinguished between adult attitudes and the children's own viewpoints. Their findings demonstrated differences in childhoods in pre-colonial Africa and the colonial era. Early fourteenth century Arab trader, Ibn Batutta, lauded boys in the courts in Mali and Kilwa who learned the Qur'an before assuming positions in Islamic administrations. On the other hand he criticised the tradition of girls sauntering naked in the presence of Muslim suitors. This suggests that norms about childhood and behaviour need to be understood in the context of where and when people live.

Early writings on African childhoods carried racialised connotations. Dudley Kidd's '*Savage Childhood*' (1906) and the Natal Colonial Report of 1907 depicted Africans as happy primitives whose development peaked at puberty. Kidd's thesis became a basis of European rule in Africa during the colonial period. Africa became known as the 'Dark Continent' and early missionaries wrote letters home describing 'heathen' girls and polygamous marriages obstructing the spread of Christianity (<http://www.faqs.org/childhood/A-Ar/Africa.html>). In South Africa, the Colony of Natal Report of 1907 stated that '*the treatment of natives in general must be of an autocratic nature [as the] masses are scarcely out of their childhood*'. It implied that they were, in a sense, but children and needed protection from inherent weaknesses of an underdeveloped humanity and needed guiding through the transition stage. In the bigger picture this was a

justification for marginalization of the indigenous inhabitants of the colonies. This idea infantilised all Africans as they were seen and treated as children.

Wells' (2009) review of the historiography of childhood in four continents (America, Africa, Europe and Asia) suggest that societies recognised childhood as a distinct phase in the life cycle and children as different kinds of people to adults from as early as the fourth century A.D. with varying perspectives on this topic as in the arguments presented by De Mause in section 3.2 of the thesis. In essence, childhood was seen as a status and process, viewed as a stage towards adulthood (a state of becoming rather than a state of being). It could be argued that in traditional African society every child mattered in terms of care and protection which was a shared responsibility in the family and extending to the larger community context as expounded by the old African proverb at the beginning of this section. The concept of childhood based on innocence and play exists in many forms in African societies. An example is that of Pondo girls in South Africa who transformed corncobs into dolls that they carried on their backs and boys practiced combat skills by tossing sticks at a branch set upright on the ground (www.faqs.org/childhood/A-Ar/Africa.html). Play existed in many different forms for different age groups as a preparation for future roles as the children move through the developmental stages to adulthood.

However, child studies in Africa are fragmented and there is no developed discourse on African childhoods (Ennew, 2003). Germann (2005) attributes the scarcity of literature on African childhoods to the strength of oral history which largely remains undocumented. Furthermore, Ennew argues that traditionally the main themes in academic research on children in Africa focused not on childhood but on transitions as shown by anthropological interest in initiation and puberty rites, socialisation and intergenerational relationships of power. Wells (2009: 9) adds another argument that '*what we know of children's experiences and society, concepts of childhood in the history of Africa is very limited*'.

According to Wells, there are no coherent narratives of children's worlds (that attempt to present the voice of the African child) in Africa as there is for North America and European history. The reason for this is that research into African childhoods remains undeveloped and written sources tend to focus on transitions and not childhood itself. The exception is the *East African Childhood: Three Versions* (Fox, 1967) and perhaps Grier's account of child labour in colonial Zimbabwe. Writings on the *East African Childhood* painted a picture of early childhood in colonial East Africa in relation to child labour. Literature on African child labour reveals how important it was in promoting capitalist accumulation by the white elite and the colonial state in both East and Southern Africa (Swai, 1979; Chirwa, 1993 and Hansen, 1990).

Ennew (2003) points to the dominance of influences of constructions of childhood that have little to do with African contexts, such as the ideal family concept consisting of protected children and protecting adults. The nuclear family concept is derived from Western notions and has been applied as relevant to the African concepts. This is mainly the child protection and social work practice view dominant in the Western world whose concept of the child is engendered, ageless, small, innocent and in need of protection. This, according to Ennew, has led to the globalization of a construct by the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child through international organizations such as UNICEF and the media.

Localizing the concept of the child such as *The African Child, Indian Child and the Girl Child* is not possible on the grounds that children experience childhood differently and are sometimes confined to places and spaces predetermined by socio-economic groups to which they are part of. Ennew cites the example of Queen Elizabeth II and the late Benazir Bhutto who could have shared many more features in common (as privileged) than with girls and boys in Manchester or Islamabad. To drive the point home, the African child herding camels in rural Ethiopia and a child on the streets of war ravaged Somalia or a boy

or a girl herding goats in rural Matabeleland experience childhood in different respects. Similarly, a child in the Locations (western suburbs of Bulawayo) and a child in the privileged eastern suburbs of Bulawayo would experience different childhoods depending on their socio-economic status. Ennew (2003) makes the point that it is best to recognise children as individuals who experience a variety of childhoods in different ways. This goes against a sociological or social constructionist view that would see children not as autonomous individuals, but as sharing certain traits and experiences because of social and cultural groupings and economic status. It could be argued that the above contexts are pertinent to street children as a group whose social and economic standing use the streets for a variety of things and thus the street has many meanings and connotations in different contexts.

Others like Kesby *et al* (2006) argue for the unpacking of universal models of childhood in order to reveal the diversity of 'other childhoods' in what they call the global south. They call for theorising and deconstructing local culturally specific understandings of childhood. A further argument is made by Kesby *et al* (2006) that 'universal' models of childhood used by international organisations are based on idealised 'western' norms and often obscure rather than reveal childhoods in the developing world. In his controversial novel '*House of Hunger*', the late Zimbabwean writer Marechera (1979) presents a typical example of the 'other childhood' in an 'environnement of poverty, hunger and filth, the loneliness and brutality of all human relations' (Essay Review, 1987).

3.5 Childhood in Zimbabwe

In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, childhood was an important category of experience and marked a stage in the life course of an individual characterised by rituals to mark the transition to adulthood. The Ndebele nation regulated youths through initiation and military service (Bhebhe, 1979, cited in Kesby *et al*, 2006) while the Shona did the same through marriage.

Children (in the same manner as women) gained resources through their guardians and had limited access to decision-making processes in the community. Children held a central position of importance in society such that a childless marriage could lead to divorce or the woman's family offered a compensatory second wife or a brother would secretly impregnate his sister-in law.

Graves (1988) states that '*before all else in Shona life, a person is a member of the community*'. This can be extended to the whole of Zimbabwe. Strong intimate bonds develop and in turn strengthen family ties from early childhood to adulthood. Mothers, in particular, occupied a very important position in early childhood as a small child was kept close to the mother who carried him or her in a comfortable sling. This exercise could go on for up to two years. Dependence on the family for sustenance and protection could be extended to three to four generations. Those who have plenty are obliged to share and when in need there is an expectation of help from family members. This is true in many African societies and in particular the Ndebele society whose heartland is Bulawayo where the study was carried out. Nyathi (2005) describes how the traditional Ndebele society was organised with members of the family working together in all aspects of life.

Zimbabwean researchers like Chinyangara *et al* (1997) state that children in the African traditional context did not belong exclusively to their parents but also to the community and the broader group of kin. Article 31 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ARWC) recognises this aspect. As implied by Graves (1988), a child has obligations first to the community and kinsmen and then, after these, to their parents. In traditional African societies the community had authority over parents and thus in principle was able to protect children against abuse, neglect and exploitation by parents or other members of the community. It was a well-established tradition that the community and the extended family provided for children whose biological parents were unable to take care of them. Orphans were relatively easily adopted within families through kinship systems.

Wusu and Isiugo (2006) acknowledge the strength of a closely knit group of relatives in many African societies who share the costs of rearing children in terms of emotion, time, finance and other material support. A child was the responsibility of the family, community and the nation before the natural parents (Chinyangara *et al.*, 1997; Kesby *et al.*, 2006).

Grier (2006) argues that in colonial Zimbabwe childhood was a racialised concept that meant that lives of black and white children had expectations placed on them by the colonial state; white farmers and their families were entirely shaped by racist ideology. The childhood of settlers was organised in a different way from the childhood of Africans. One key aspect noted by Grier (2006:29) is that the colonial state (1893-1980) '*used the belief that children should contribute to the material reproduction of their households - a core aspect of the construction of childhood among the Shona and Ndebele at the end of the nineteenth century*'. In essence, childhood carried a class outlook and even today there are marked differences in childhoods of the elite (the majority of them are blacks) who moved to occupy the white-settler privileged space at independence) and the working class and the vast rural population in Zimbabwe.

The fact that there were no children living on the streets of major cities until well after independence in 1980 was largely due to strict laws and restrictions on who lived in towns by the colonial administration. It was almost impossible to see children working as vendors, car washers or begging prior to Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 as municipal by-laws restricted such activities and were vigorously and brutally enforced. However, Grier (1996) cites examples where in the 1920s and 1950s native boys aged 10-14 years were attracted to the towns, mines and other centres where they found wage employment as domestic workers and gardeners in white and black households. Others worked as cooks and cleaners for 'senior' black miners in the company's single sex compounds. This classification differs from the common definition of street children of boys and girls for

whom the street has become a place to live and work. Nonetheless, it signifies a trend for children and young people finding the attraction of city lights which has become a world-wide phenomenon. After independence, enforcement of by-laws and restrictions of the pre-independence administration were eased and gradually street children appeared on the streets of major towns and cities forcing the government and local authorities to act. The numbers kept increasing and street children became more visible although there were no accurately recorded numbers.

Children living and working on the streets are, therefore, a challenge to concepts of childhood and ideas of what constitutes childhood. This lends weight to the argument that children (and indeed street children) experience childhood differently and their experiences are unique and rich in terms of what goes on in their formative years. Street children all over the world constitute a unique group of children who often defy norms of what childhood should be as they exist outside what is often considered by many as 'normal' childhood often characterised (in the developed countries) by the 'family, school and play'.

Children living on the streets are not unique to Bulawayo but a common feature in many cities in Zimbabwe and in many developed and developing countries around the world. In many respects such things are 'unAfrican', that is, not consistent with long established traditions around childhood and child care where a child belonged to and was raised by the community with a collective responsibility. The extended family network has been under strain (in Zimbabwe) and in many cases has no capacity to fulfil many of its traditional functions. The emergence and dominance of the concept of the nuclear family in many urban areas has weakened the extended family support network and the traditional safeguards around care of vulnerable children (German, 2005). In some way the phenomenon of street children may be viewed as the ugly face of colonisation and industrialisation or modernisation in the African context which has transformed the traditional way of life and eroded its protective mechanisms. Many children and families

are grappling with poverty and starvation in a country where families have been decimated by HIV/AIDS. For example, a survey by Mashumba (1995) found that relatives were struggling to care for AIDS orphans while Foster *et al* (1995) postulate that the emergence of child-headed households' show that the extended family is under stress.

3.6 Examining the definitional question: What do we mean by street children?

What is a street child? On the surface, it may seem like a simple question but it is a complex one that has been answered in many different ways at different times and in different places. The answers have been shaped by wider changes in the concepts of family and childhood. The concept of street children has a strong association with the family and the concept of childhood. The family is seen as a vehicle that will carry children through childhood into adulthood. The boundaries of the beginning and the end of childhood, how children are raised and their place are set by society (Wells, 2009).

There is a consensus that street children do not constitute a homogenous group (Glauser 1990; Ennew 2003; De Moura 2002; Thomas de Benitez 2007) but exist in a continuum of categories ranging from children who spend some time on the streets and sleep in the house (with ill-prepared adults or carers) and those who mainly live on the streets with no adult supervision or care and therefore are difficult to describe and target.

Some reasons are advanced to justify the use of the term 'street children'. Sexton (2005) points out that the term 'street children' is commonly used because it is short and widely understood as giving them an identity and a sense of belonging. This identity and sense of belonging ties them to the street and what goes on in the streets which are both public and private spaces depending on what one intends to use them for. This leads to their social exclusion as they are seen as a deviant group of children.

Veale *et al* (2000) argue that the term 'street children' is a product of a linguistic process that serves to abstract children from their situation and position them in a state of

abandonment. Street children are in a ‘social pool’ of individuals depicted as ‘outside childhood’ and therefore a problem that needs fixing. A strong argument can be made that this is merely labelling and stigmatising the children concerned and can be construed as negative. By labelling them, as Nyatsanza (2009) argues, we are shunning our responsibility for them and refusing to acknowledge our failure as a society. In essence, the phenomenon of street children is largely a human rights issue. Children who attend school are called pupils and or school children but they are not reduced by this definition. Volpi (2002) strengthens this argument in that for some agencies the term ‘street children’ is considered inappropriate and creates an artificial category. Furthermore, it diverts attention from the interconnected dimensions of child vulnerability (Volpi 2002). For example, Mpofu (2010) argues that the term ‘street kids’ is used to justify their exclusion from main stream society.

3.7 Defining street children

Many authors and researchers have spent a great deal of effort trying to define street children and often struggling with the UNICEF categorisation of street children as ‘on’ and ‘of’ the street. Nonetheless it remains the most quoted definition in research and academic literature as it provides a helpful benchmark:

‘Boys and girls for whom the street, including unoccupied dwellings, wasteland, etc. has become their home and /or source of livelihood, and who are inadequately protected or supervised by responsible adults’ (Volpi, 2002:11).

UNICEF conceptualises street children as boys and girls less than 18 years of age. This definition distinguishes between two main groups: ‘children on the street’ (those who are home based) and ‘children of the streets’ (street-based).

The first group spends much of the day on the street doing various activities, has family support and may return home at night. Their family support base may have been weakened

such that they must share the responsibility for their families' survival by working in the city streets and market places. They continue to view life from the point of view of their families although the home ceases to be the centre for play, culture and daily life. The second group spends most of their days and nights on the street and is functioning without family support (UNICEF, 1997, 1998). These children live outside the 'normal' family environment and may have occasional or casual family ties or none at all. They may be subject to abuse, neglect and exploitation and many other ills on the streets. They are a smaller number than those 'on the street'. The UNICEF classification is dominant in most literature on street children and is assumed to reflect the process of becoming a street child (McAlpine, 2007).

A third way of describing street children is to see them as comprising 'candidates for the street', that is those children who live in slums and suffer from family break-up, abuse, neglect and lack of schooling opportunities (Dunford, 1996). This goes further than the limited UNICEF definition and recognises the differences in circumstances for every child, who for one reason or another, find themselves having something to do with the street on a short or long term basis. It is also the case that street children are largely referred to as 'Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances' (CEDC) in many settings, but more particularly in National Reports to Committees on the Rights of the Child (Ennew, 2003). The concept of Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances was originally meant to be applicable to refugees, children with disabilities and those affected by organised violence and unaccompanied children in disasters. It is reasonable to argue that for many children in the developing world and Africa, difficult circumstances affect a large number of children who live under grinding poverty and face uncertain futures including the consequences of the devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic. It, therefore, seems an injustice that poverty and lack of food security are not included as causes of difficult circumstances.

Sociologists and anthropologists are increasingly recognising that the definition of street children is hotly contested (Thomas de Benitez, 2007). What constitutes a street child or person remains a major definitional problem both in research and academic literature. There seems to be a tendency to narrowly define or categorise street children and use the definitions emanating from organisations which assist street children (De Moura, 2002). Such definitions can be too narrow because they exclude those children who choose not to attend such organizations and are not just definitions but attempts to measure numbers and certain characteristics. The commonly used definitions of street children are mainly from reports compiled by non-governmental organisations and they tend to use the concepts of family connection, work, time, behaviour and location. Family connection seems to be the first line of determining who a street child is, followed by work and location. The length of time a child spends on the streets is used to distinguish between the categories of street children types but they are not necessarily concrete or true for every individual child in the context of street life.

The UNICEF definition has limitations as stated above mainly in that it is not broad enough to cover the complexities of the phenomenon. Many children fall between groups and this excludes children who come to the streets and live on a seasonal basis; child prostitutes who come to the streets at night and those accompanying physically challenged parents and carers who are certainly a different category. Sexton (2005) suggests expanding the definition by adding a new category known as 'in the street' comprising those children with no family contact, who consider the streets their home, seek shelter, food and a sense of belonging among their peers. Sexton sees this group as detached from their families and would include orphans and children abandoned by their parents unable to care for them due to poverty, disease or personal problems. Other terms like 'street connected children' and 'children in the street situations' have been suggested (Ruzzini, 1996; Thomas de Benitez, 1999).

It can be argued that there is no internationally agreed definition of street children (Thomas de Benitez, 2007) both from the literature and research on street children. However, there seems to be an acceptance that street children are not a homogenous group (Ayuku *et al.*, 2003; Glauser, 1990; Ennew, 2000; de Moura, 2002). The widely used UNICEF definition is considered unworkable even in the Latin American context (where it originated) and surprisingly, it is applied as an operational definition in many street children studies without any qualification (Ennew, 2003). Ayuku *et al* (2003) argues for analysis of more case studies to determine the validity of the UNICEF classification in contemporary Africa.

It is reasonable to conclude from the literature and research studies on street children that definitions will continue to evolve in an attempt to capture the fluidity and differences in street children's circumstances around the world. There is a need to recognise that within these multiple and varied definitions, it is problematic to classify a child because of their individuality, background, potential and aspirations. The varied definitions indicate that there are grey areas and, therefore, there should be no absolute sense of the word. In my research I considered it important to clearly identify the children involved as well as overlaps that may exist within the identified group, that is, where on the continuum of the research participants lie (this is discussed further in the methods section). It is also important for contemporary research to move beyond the focus on the street and acknowledge that there is more to the lives of children than what is usually revealed by categorisations that are based on location, economic activities and neglect by society. While categorisation of street children seems unhelpful as far as defining street children, it helps in determining the numbers and types of street children. It also helps in deciding which group of children researchers or street children organisations work with while acknowledging that the definition of street children is problematic and further that the phenomenon is not restricted to specific geographical areas (Connolly, 1990).

While there is no universal definition of street children it is possible to construct a broad definition based on the literature and UNICEF's concept of 'boys and girls' under the age of 18 for whom the street and unoccupied dwellings (among other places) have become home. This broad concept of street children helps to mark parameters as to which category or group of street children to focus on. This study's focus was the street children (boys and girls) who work and live on the streets acknowledging the possible family links that may exist. In this research the term 'street children' is not gendered although there is recognition that there are slight differences in terms of how boys and girls access and use space and interact with their immediate environment.

3.8 Street children in history and over time

Historically, streets of large urban areas were both theatre and battleground for children of the poor (WHO, 1993). References to street children have been found in medieval writings from Spain and Italy, in novels of Twain, Dickens, Gorki and Hugo, and organisations have developed to assist them. Historically, churches, temples and mosques around the world cared for orphans, the poor and the homeless as part of their charity work.

Ball (1994) says street children accounted for most of the boy prostitutes in Augustan Rome. According to Ball (1994:4) a church council of 442 in Southern Gaul declared that, *'Concerning abandoned children, there is general complaint that they are nowadays exposed more to dogs than to kindnesses'*. Street children were debated in the Brazilian Parliament in 1888 (Thomas de Benetiz, 1999). Riis (1890) described 'Street Arabs' in New York in similar terms and his description of their characteristics and life style could easily fit with modern day street children. For example, a 'Street Arab' was described as having *'all the faults and all the virtues of lawless life he leads acknowledging no authority and owing no allegiance to anybody or anything, with his grimy fist raised against society whenever he tries to coerce him'* (Riis, 1890). Riis further claims that the

‘Street Arab’ has ‘*independence, love of freedom and absolute self-reliance, together with his rude sense of justice enabling him to govern his little community ...*’.

Ball (1994), in the introduction to *The history of abandoned children in Soviet Russia in 1918-1930*, states that orphaned and abandoned children were a source of misery from earliest times. Destitute youths were described as roaming the streets in seventeenth century Russia and further that attempts to remove the phenomenon were unsuccessful. The plight of these children is detailed in Allan Ball’s ‘*Now My Soul Is Hardened*’ where they are presented as crowding public spaces, resorting to stealing, prostitution and narcotic use. They were constructed as uncontrollable and lawless (Ball, 1994).

Today the phenomenon of street children is well recognised in many parts of the world and is not restricted to specific geographical areas. However the term ‘street children’ was first used by Henry Mayhew in 1851 when writing about London Labour and the London Poor (Scanlon *et al.*, 1998). It came into general use after the United Nations Year of the Child in 1979. Prior to 1979 street children were referred to as homeless, abandoned, or runaways. In the 1980s and 1990s the term ‘street child’ became an accepted part of the urban poverty dictionary and is widely used by UNICEF, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), writers and academics as a short-hand to describe or denote children working and or living on the streets of many urban centres throughout the Third World and beyond (Baker, 1999).

More recently, street children have become prevalent in many African cities and they are making unexpected appearances where they never existed before (Volpi, 2002). Street children now seem to be recognised as part of the urban landscape and are now found in almost every country in the world and are part of the world’s population who live in extreme poverty and are vulnerable to many forms of abuse. In the twentieth century the phenomenon of street children has been politicised and the responsibility shifted to

governments to deal with. It is evident from the literature that a humanitarian attitude gradually emerged in the twentieth century as street children became increasingly perceived as one of the major problems of our times and they are a priority for many street children organisations.

3.9 The scale of the phenomenon of street children around the world

There are no definite figures and no one knows how many street children there are worldwide (Sexton, 2005; Thomas de Benitez, 2007). This is due to the fluidity of their lives and movements and lack of comprehensive measures to account for their numbers. A UNICEF estimate in the 1990s was of 100 million children growing up on the urban streets around the world (*Campos et al.*, 1994) and this figure is often cited in many writings on street children. It is interesting to note that UNICEF (2002:37) reported that '*The latest estimates put the number of these children as high as 100 million*'. Thomas de Benetiz (2007), writing on the 'State of the World's Street Children' puts the number at between 100-150 million. Latin America has about 40 million street children with Brazil accounting for 25 million, Africa with 10 million and India with 18 million.

In relation to Asia, West (2003:2) identified a similar issue regarding numbers in that '*street children are not usually counted, nor subject to census, so their numbers are not known*'. There is over reliance on local estimates; but, even so, conservative figures indicate that there are millions of street children in the region. Sexton (2005) quotes figures from the Civic Society Forum for East and Southern Africa on Promoting and Protecting the Rights of Children as 10 000 for Uganda, 12 000 for Zimbabwe (5000 of them in Harare), 75 000 for Zambia, 150 000 for Ethiopia (Addis Ababa with 60 000) and 250 000 for Kenya (Nairobi with 60 000). While there are no reliable statistics on street children around the world there is an acknowledgement that the phenomenon of street children is one of the major challenges facing many countries.

3.10 Street children in Africa

Street children are a relatively new phenomenon in Africa compared with the history of street children in South and Central America and some parts of Asia (Sexton, 2005). Many writers and commentators maintain that the street children phenomenon has become one of the biggest problems of social welfare in most African countries (Baker, 1999; Boakye 2006; Bourdillon, 2001; Le Roux, 1996; Mwansa, Mufune and Osei-Hwedie 1994; Sexton, 2005; Tacon, 1991; Young and Barrett, 2001). The issue of culture is of significance to the study of street children particularly in the African context where the phenomenon of street children is fairly new. Culture and identity have evolved over centuries. However, modernisation and colonialism had so much influence on the traditional African way of life. The advent of Christianity altered the balance of the belief systems. It brought about Western notions of family life and it may be argued that the aim was to change systems which were considered primitive. For example, Father Prestage, founder of Empandeni Mission in 1887 was very critical of the Ndebele system of governance. On 9 July 1893 Father Prestage commented that '*The Matabele system of government was a system of iniquity and deviltry...*' (<http://www.bulawayo1872.com/history/prestagepeter.htm>). The missionaries aimed at educating children as there was no hope of achieving conversion of the adults who were loyal to their traditions.

The issue of identity and culture seems to be an old one with a new face. In the colonial era the Western World found African traditions alien and wanted to change them to fall in line with Western culture. As Christianity spread to Africa, early missionaries wanted to change Africa to be, at least, like the rest of what was then called the 'Civilised World'. In the Western World people tend to be territorial whereas in many African societies, communalism tended to dominate everyday life including raising children. However, despite the magnitude of western influences, the indigenous people in Zimbabwe resisted the imposition of the new socio-spatial order. This resulted in what Kesby *et al* (2006:189)

call '*hybridised local cultural systems*' where there is a combination of modern and traditional aspects.

Boakye (2005) argues that African societies appear not to have the resources within to tackle the phenomenon of street children. There is over reliance on the extended family networks and the social welfare model which are all under strain in many African countries due to socio-economic and political situations in some countries. Bourdillon (2001) points out how the urban environment affects the support that a child may receive from the extended family and further that other kinds of traditional support may also be weakened. Of particular relevance is the traditional fostering system in Zimbabwe among the main tribal groupings, the Ndebele and Shona. It has come under strain due to the economic hardships and the HIV/AIDS pandemic which has decimated families and communities as evidenced in Germann's (2005) study of child-headed households in Bulawayo. Kesby *et al* (2006:189) point out that the 'inherent social, economic and religious values of children meant that social crisis would not lead to their abandonment'.

In many African countries, it would appear living on the street is an 'accepted' way for boys to cope with family poverty while it is quite the opposite for girls, who are expected to remain at home. Research from Kenya

([http://www.streetchildren.org.uk/reports/Nairobistreet .children.pdf](http://www.streetchildren.org.uk/reports/Nairobistreet_children.pdf)) suggests that the presence of girls on the streets is more likely to be construed as reflecting family breakdown and to be associated with negative developmental and mental health outcomes. A UNICEF (2001) study of street children in Bulawayo showed that there were more boys than girls on living on the streets of Bulawayo. This is almost true for most of the underdeveloped world that male street children outnumber female street children.

The literature on street children has been dominated by Latin American and North American influences. Ennew (2003) cites marked historical differences between Latin

America's and Africa's colonial histories and urbanisation. In the case of Latin American countries, Ennew points out that in most cases they have common culture and languages and have experienced North American cultural and economic imperialism whereas there are marked diversities in African cultures. Therefore applying the concepts developed in Latin and North America can be viewed as an imposition of cultural assumptions from one continent to another filtered through Northern welfare agencies amid many misconceptions about Africa as a continent.

There is a strong argument for the development of an African model of street children and perhaps the use of research techniques (child-centred approaches) which recognise cultural, social and economic diversity (Ennew, 2003). The use of adaptable research methods is important in the context of the diversity found across Africa, as shown in Young and Barrett's (2001) study of street children in Kampala where adaptable visual methods were used.

3.11 Representations of street children

The world of fiction and most famously Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838) conjures up street children by describing Fagin's crew of pickpockets in Victorian England, which depict the contemporary circumstances of many street children's journeys and encounters with street life (Kaplin, 1993). Dickens dramatised a historical mirror of similar conditions in the modern cities of the contemporary world. Sherlock Holmes' *Baker Street Irregulars* show the existence of street children in nineteenth century London (Riis, 1890). Arthur Conan Doyle's writings (Doyle, 1891) depict homelessness that now exists among children in many cities around the world. Although set in the realm of fiction, these pieces of work bring to the fore the misery that daily life is for large numbers of children caught up in generational cycles of poverty and despair. Negative reporting can be traced to these early writings and many others which tend to associate street children with lawlessness. Feeny

(2005) strengthens this view in pointing out that the character of the street urchin has for many years played an important part in both fantasy and reality of contemporary society.

In real-life situations street children experience negativity throughout the world. They have been referred to in derogatory terms such as '*gamin*' (*urchin*) and '*chinchés*' (bed bugs) in Colombia, '*pajaro frutero*' (fruit birds) in Peru, '*saligoman*' (nasty kids) in Rwanda, '*balados*' (wonderers) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (WHO, 1993) and '*strollers*' or '*omalalepayipini*' (those who sleep in pipes) in Johannesburg (Le Roux, 1996). In Zimbabwe (particularly in media circles) they are often referred to as '*street kids*' (see Figure 6, page 30 of the thesis). It is interesting to note that they call themselves differently using terms such as '*Magunduru*' which depicts sleeping rough (Wakatama, 2007). The names, although derogatory, describe some of the salient characteristics ascribed to street children in different parts of the world as well as the nature of activities that they engage in to survive.

It could be argued that the media and society tend to have a negative perception of street children and are not convinced that they are vulnerable children who need help. Geilen and Roopnarine (2004) argue that the media dramatizes the 'bad boy' image of street children by placing emphasis on the extreme case scenarios such as the youngest child on the streets and the most intoxicated or delinquent. The negative reporting is widespread in many African countries where street children are reported to carry syringes filled with contaminated HIV-positive blood and threatened to inject those who refuse to give them money (Geilen and Roopnarine, 2004). For example, newspaper headlines like the one in Figure 6 in this thesis promotes a negative image of street children as young persons high on glue and perhaps this is aimed at discouraging charitable individuals from giving them money.

Marima *et al* (1995) state that many members of the public found street children's presence intrusive despite daily contact with them. Marima *et al* (1995) cite The Sunday Mail (2 April 1995) headline '*Street Kids Menace*' where a member of the public lamented lack of police control of the streets kids. Media headlines like the ones above tend to reinforce the negative attitude and hostility towards street children. There is no effort made towards finding out why they resort to using glue and what their experiences are like before and after sniffing glue. It can be argued that the media is the primary source of taken-for-granted frameworks for understanding social phenomenon. They define issues and legitimise approaches to tackle the issues of concern. Thus knowledge and insight on the lives of street children is often derived from mediated experience, what is written in print media, broadcast on radio and television (Power, 1999). It follows, therefore, that the views that others have of us are social constructs but after repetition make them just something 'everyone knows' (Oliver, 1999).

Media representations place emphasis on individual responsibility and victim blaming. It is common for news items, for example, to employ two contrasting frames for reporting on poor people. Power (1999) identifies these as the prominent conservative frame which individualises poor people as the cause of their own situation by choosing not to participate in the economy. The other one is the liberal frame which portrays poor people as 'needy or victims' of inequitable social structures and relative deprivation. The latter characteristic is often associated with 'innocent children' while holding their parents as irresponsible adults. From this narrative arises the notion of the 'undeserving' and the 'deserving' poor. In the midst of such reporting, socially disadvantaged groups such as street children lack a voice regarding issues affecting their lives. Institutional practice and editorial policy dictate and determine issues to be covered and the 'angle' taken in coverage of various issues including street children.

Common public responses to street children are pity and hostility with street children perceived as victims or villains (Aptekar, 1998; Hecht, 1998). A UNICEF (2001) study in Zimbabwe on street children noted a growing disquiet on the numbers of children working and living on the streets. These children were portrayed, particularly in the print and electronic media, as being little thieves or criminals in the making. Whenever they feature in the media they are often portrayed as synonymous with embarrassment and bad for business (<http://cc.msncache.com/cache.aspx?q=media+reporting+on+street-children+Africa+d=76012729224308>).

In the last two decades a new image of street children emerged where they were recognised as having resilient qualities and survivors despite being exploited. One example is a film ‘*Everyone’s Child*’ (1996) based on the life experiences of street children in Harare. The film shows how a young boy, Itai, who left his rural home due to poverty and orphanhood joined up with a gang of street kids dominated by an older boy and this became a surrogate family for him, roaming the streets, scrounging through garbage cans, sniffing glue, trying to make money however they could. Itai’s dream of helping his family slips further away when he is arrested in a botched robbery and sent to a reform school. What follows later is a bout of anger towards his tormentors at the reform institution. Itai’s sister takes a different route to resolving her problems and in the process suffers from sexual exploitation.

Xoliswa Sithole’s ‘*Zimbabwe’s Forgotten Children*’ documentary in 2005 captured the downside of life for street children and revealed what makes the subject very emotive (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bo_9luSwIU). The abuses which include beatings by law enforcement agents and ‘cheap labour’ are the order of the day. The award winning movie ‘*Slum Dog Millionaire*’ (2008) based on life experiences of street children in India made worldwide headlines. Street children featured everywhere from the New York Times to Amnesty International Reports, the BBC evening news and *Ladies’ Home Journal*. Of

recent relevance is the Ross Kemp's 2008 BBC documentary on '*Glue Kids*' of Nairobi filmed on the side-lines of gangs in Kenya

(https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=glue+kids+in+nairobi&rlz=1C1TEUA_enGB480GB480&espv=2&biw=1366&bih=643&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=) and another documentary on the Africa Channel entitled '*Stuck in the Middle*' on Street Children in Cape Town. Despite all the publicity and visibility street children are perceived as illegitimate by authorities and some sections of the society (Hecht, 1998) and those in power see street children as criminals or potential criminals and an indictment on the running of the cities (Bourdillon, 1994).

3.12 Marginal identities

Street children are marginalised and excluded from public life and spatial environments by virtue of 'deviant' characteristics and homelessness and their status as minors (Young and Barrett, 2001). Their survival strategy involves playing 'cat and mouse' with law enforcement agencies and sleeping rough in dark corners (Karombo, 2004). Perhaps a concise description of street children is that of a 'background presence' (doing odd jobs, scavenging for food and begging) amongst the most deprived with no access to education, health and being victims of violence (Scanlon *et al.*, 1998). Identities constructed by marginalised people all over the world are often fluid and possibly unstable (Herrera *et al.*, 2009) and avoid, by default, any sense of self. However, accepting these problems of fluidity, the dual notions of 'identities' and ascribed 'identity' are perhaps the strongest starting point from which we can attempt to define how they 'negotiate' space, places and interactions amongst themselves and their immediate environment and issues for homeless children who live and work on the streets, the representations of whom, 'hold to their exclusion and ascribe social deviance' (ibid: 67).

The relationship between street children on the one hand and authorities and the general public on the other is often ridden with conflict. Hecht (1998) sees a denial on the part of authorities and the general public. He also sees complicity by authorities and the general public in terms of attitudes to the plight of street children. This stems from the fact that street children are a challenge to many of the society's norms and values. Authorities and the general public have no structures or ways to accommodate street children in everyday life activities. This point is supported by the heavy handedness (forceful removals from the streets) of authorities and attitudes of some sections of the public to street children.

3.13 Street children in Bulawayo

The picture of street children on page 30 of this thesis (dated January 1991) is probably one of the first highlighting the phenomenon of street children in Bulawayo. It appears that the phenomenon has become a cause for concern over the last two decades. Thuthuka Street Children Project in Bulawayo (a Scripture Union sponsored project) has dealt with the offspring of street children needing the same attention as their mothers which suggests that the problem is growing and becoming even more complex, as a second generation of children was being raised on the streets. Mawoneke *et al* (2001: 112) quotes a worker from Thuthuka Street Children Centre in Bulawayo saying '*I am now seeing the second generation of street children. The mother came to the street when she was young. She met a boy, who was born on the streets, and they recently had a child on the streets*'.

Clayton (2007) writing from Johannesburg says of street children, '*Now there are hordes of them, ragged and barefoot, in most cities, they beg outside bars and hotels, easy prey for night prowlers. They sleep in doorways and derelict buildings*' (<http://timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/articles/577094.ece>). Furthermore, comments by Japhet Ndabeni-Ncube, the Mayor of Bulawayo in 2007, highlight the concern the City Fathers had about street children. The Mayor said '*Bulawayo is facing a growing problem*

of street dwellers in general we have vagrants of all ages flooding the city centre. Our streets, long known for their cleanliness, are fast becoming streets of shame’.

(http://209.85.229.132/search?q=cache:TK8feVZnp18J:www.newsfromafrica.org/newsfromafrica/articles/art_3750.html+rescuing+bulawayo%27s+street+kids&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk). It is interesting to note that this was viewed as a social welfare rather than a

human rights issue. There is no comprehensive strategy at local government level to address this phenomenon and the only notable efforts are those of the Bulawayo Task Force on Street Children mentioned in Chapter One of the thesis. There is scope for this study to look at the experiences of street children in Bulawayo in order to contribute knowledge of the phenomenon which has been present in the city for over two decades.

3.14 Policy and practice responses to street children in Zimbabwe

The Department of Social Welfare is the main government arm with responsibility for child welfare and child protection. The Government of Zimbabwe is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is recognised as the most powerful (international) voice of concern for children worldwide. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) recognises the African traditional context of children thought of as not belonging exclusively to their parents but also in the broader community context (Article 31 of the ACRWC). The government policy that safeguards the interest of children is the Child Protection and Adoption Act (1972) Chapter 33 (amended), and the Legal Age of Majority Act of 1982. The Child Protection and Adoption Act (Chapter 33), in Section 2, define a child as ‘*any person (including infant) under the age of 16 years*’. The Act defines a person between age 16 and 18 as a young person while the Legal Age of Majority Act (1982) defines any person below the age of 18 as a minor. The latter focuses on attainment of full adult status at the age of eighteen for all purposes. However, this runs contrary to

customary law where a person is considered a child as long as they are under parental authority rather than being defined by chronological age (Chinyangara *et al.*, 1997).

The government's response to street children in Zimbabwe has been largely characterised by punitive measures including removals to detention centres and places of safety (Bourdillon, 1994; Marima *et al.*, 1995; Tibaijuka, 2005). The extent of brutality is found in Takesure's testimony quoted by Bourdillon (1991:26); he says '*It was very bad. We were arrested for no reason. People were rounded up and sentenced to three years for no offence. At Kadoma we had to live with others who were convicted of robbery and rape*'.

There was a massive round-up of street children in 1995 in Harare where many street children were taken to Chambuta Camp (a refuge facility formerly occupied by refugees from Mozambique) in the eastern part of Zimbabwe. Most of the street children involved in the 1995 removals found their way back to the streets even if it meant walking through a lion-infested Gonarezhou National Park (Sexton, 2005). Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Restore Order) in 2005 included forced removals of vulnerable populations (homeless urban dwellers) with '*street children rounded up and placed in institutions and transit camps*' (Tibaijuka, 2005:41).

According to Tibaijuka (2005), the forced placement of street children in these institutions, generally meant for delinquents, was not appropriate under the international humanitarian standards in respect of Inter-agency Guiding Principles of Unaccompanied and Separated Children. Suffice to argue that the government's response seems to be negating the principle of children's well-being. This punitive approach towards street children was evident in Bulawayo in 2014 when the local authorities were preparing for the Youth Games. Masline Moyo, an orphan picked up from the streets of Bulawayo, said '*They rounded us and loaded us in their big trucks and ordered us to stay here and never to return as they said, to disturb the clean city*' (ZimEye, 23 November, 2014). In the same

article another street child narrated their ordeal at the hands of Bulawayo city council security, *'We were made to stay here without food and blankets, after they destroyed our blankets, which were donated by some Indians, in June this year'*. Bourdillon (1994) argues that the removal approach is based on a globalised view of childhood and on middle-class perceptions of what childhood should be- a time to learn and play.

While there are legal instruments to protect and promote the well-being of all children in Zimbabwe there appears to be a wide gap between policy and practice. There are still a lot of questions about how the legislation translates into protecting and assisting street children in Bulawayo. Wakatama (2007:226) concluded that *'The government of Zimbabwe does not have any clear policy on the problem of street children. There is less regard for the rights of street children to protection'*.

3.15 Studies on street children

Many studies on street children have focused on causes and remedies to the phenomenon (Hecht, 1998) rather than on the construction of the phenomenon itself and the perspectives of the children. There has been a lot of academic work on street children originating from Latin America by Aptekar (1988), Connolly (1990), Felsman(1981), Glauser (1990), Lucchini (1993a), Lusk (1989) among others. For example studies in Latin America have been carried out in terms of conflict with the law highlighting the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency and violence on the slums and streets (Aptekar, 1991; Hecht, 1998) while studies in South East Asia have focused on the exploitation of street children and child labour (Bose, 1992; Ali *et al.*, 2004).

There have been studies in African countries such as Swart (1990), Baker (1999) and Le Roux (1996) in South Africa, Lalor (1993) in Sudan and Ethiopia, Young and Barrett (2001) in Uganda, Veale and Dona (2003) in Rwanda. In Zimbabwe, street children have been studied in terms of disintegration of the family ties, sexually transmitted diseases

(Bourdillon, 1994, 2001; Dube, 1997) and HIV/AIDS (Germann, 2005; Kesby *et al.*, 2006 and Mawoneke *et al.*, 2001) and children's rights (Wakatama, 2007). Many studies now question the adult-centred approach in research with children in favour of participatory methods which allow active participation of children who for long have been seen as passive subjects (Young and Barrett, 2001; Wakatama 2007).

Small-scale research on street children has been carried out mainly by academics from the University of Zimbabwe (Dube, 1997; Muchini and Nyandiya-Bundy, 1991; Rurevo and Bourdillon, 2001) and children's rights campaigners such as Germann and Sexton. These were mainly exploratory studies and only Germann's study concentrated on Bulawayo although its main focus was child-headed households (Germann, 2005). The phenomenon of street children was partially covered. The only extensive study of street children was a country-wide study by UNICEF (2001) that partially covered street children in Bulawayo. The study showed that in Bulawayo the majority of the children slept both at home and on the streets. Those classified as 'children of the street' accounted for 12.2% and those classified as 'children on the street' accounted for 5.3%. A sizable percentage (31.4%) of the total in this study (260) had homes to go to at night and some stayed with biological parents or members of the extended family. The 'on the street' category were aged between 12 and 15 and 16 to 18 whereas the 'of the street' category were aged between 11-15 years. This study confirmed that poverty combined with lack of support and care by parents and extended family were the main reasons why children opted to live on the streets.

Like other studies, the UNICEF (2001) study did not address the experiences of street children or present their views in their words. It focused on causal factors and categories of street children. Most research on street children in Zimbabwe took the form of quantitative surveys which sought to establish numbers of street children, reasons for their presence on the streets, their household and demographic characteristics as well as their survival skills.

Interestingly, the UNICEF study revealed that street children perceived their lives as hopeless and helpless, no option except to live on the streets. They felt fatalistic and faced bleak futures and felt that the general public disliked them and saw them as troublesome and that they should be forcibly removed from the streets. A sizable number felt the public were very supportive.

Research studies from Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa confirm that street children are a growing phenomenon in many African cities (Roux, 1996; Bourdillon, 2001; Young and Barrett, 2001; Boakye, 2006). As has been the case in other parts of the world intervention strategies tend to focus on the welfare principle or model derived from Western concepts. Most research on street children has not adequately presented their life experiences. It is therefore crucial to investigate how street children characterised themselves and how they construct reality from their experiences on the streets of Bulawayo. Of particular interest is how street children relate to issues of access or lack of access to public spaces and places in Bulawayo. An examination of their interaction within the urban space with competing demands of industry and commerce is a challenge for this study. It is also important to look at how street children are perceived by other social agents of society (law enforcement and other social care professionals) including the media and other important factors such as cultural influences.

3.16 Theorising space and street children

It is impossible to understand how individuals and particular groups negotiate and live in spaces and places without first understanding the lives and strategies of those who populate urban spaces like Bulawayo. Space is created in territories and carries the idea of territoriality. Sack's definition of territoriality is that '*Individuals or a group attempt to affect, influence or control people, phenomenon, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a different area*' (1986:19)

Giddens (1984) further advances the understanding of territory in the 'locale', where interaction in a physical space within defined boundaries helps in concentrating which shows the relationship between people and their spaces. With regards to street children it is important to consider the concept of the creation of spaces in the inner city areas and the way they are produced in the context of the hierarchical status they fall in. According to Baldwin (1998) *'Those that fall in the lower (rungs) status in the social hierarchy are situated in the inner city where it is highly congested and those that live there exist for the convenience of the services of the city centre'*.

It is where we find the 'other community' which carry with them characteristics of being violent (Dwyer and Jones III, 2000). A similar view of the inner city is presented by Farrar (2002) who depicts the 'other' inner city areas as being populated by city 'rejects' that have been excluded from the sphere of respectable community.

As stated earlier in the literature review, street children are seen as or considered illegitimate in an urban landscape. According to Feeny (2005:14):

'Street children remain threatening to social harmony because they thrive outside authority in ways that contravene accepted understandings of what children should and can do'.

It is from this view that the perceived need to organise and control children and young people as well as keep them within the family or institutions (manageable units) arises. It, therefore, appears logical that the proper place for children is the home, the school or any other regulated environment where they can be guided and protected. In essence, the group that bears the responsibility to protect owns power and imposes it upon others as a manifestation of their authority (Crang and Thrift, 2000). Power is seen as a productive force although not implying that force is good, but, only in the sense that it was deployed actively in shaping experience and forms, the attitudes and the approaches to life of the

individual subjects. Street children are deemed to occupy and to be visible in places and spaces that are not the 'home', hence the difficulties to control them. In terms of their interactive construction of day-to-day reality have the ingredients of all environments and habitats regardless of adult expectations and how the social world is organised. Street children are known to identify and use certain urban spaces and places for their own safety and enjoyment. They compete for space with members of the public and in the process also construct their own multiple subcultures and identities. Foucault's theories of space and time and the deconstructionist approach of discourse analysis have made it imperative to acknowledge that street children are capable of constructing meaning and subverting power. There is also an understanding that they are not ageless and genderless.

The debate on spaces and places centres on the definition of the two concepts. Relph (1976) defines space as distance stretching out in all directions (all three dimensions) and takes place to be more delimited setting than space, with specific meaning and attributes. Kusenback (2003) talks of giving place primacy over space while Relph (1976), a humanist geographer, talks about actual places, imagined and remembered ones and further argues that perceptual space is richly differentiated into places or centres of special significance. Taun (1977) adds that space is more abstract than place and that what begins in experience as an undifferentiated space becomes place and the individual begins to attribute certain meanings to it. It comes as no surprise given the definitions of space and place that street children are mainly located in and around where they live. Only they can point out, show and tell about their places and this can only happen after connecting with these places physically. Overall, there needs to be a better phenomenological understanding of how individuals comprehend and engage with their physical and social environments in everyday life.

A closer look at urban childhoods and city streets takes the debate further. Connolly and Ennew (1996) state that city centres are where adults go about their business at different

times of the day. Children's access to the city centre is relatively confined such as travelling to and from school at specific times of the day or accompanied by an adult. The Commercial Business District (CBD) is a public space where the state, in the form of the police, acts on behalf of business interests to confront the marginalised groups (White, 1990). The same city centres attract street children who are in search of income-generating possibilities that are denied to them because of their age. The streets offer a number of consumer and entertainment possibilities such as fast food outlets, cinemas and other places of public interest. In general children are denied income-generating possibilities because of their age but street children break these age barriers. Some public places such as parks and shopping malls offer them privacy and freedom from surveillance.

In essence, the Foucauldian lens can be used to examine the construct of street children and their use of public and private space. It is a useful tool to deconstruct the complex phenomenon of street children. There is a need to move away from the practitioner view of street children based on the welfare model to a realisation that street children are more complex than that. It is evident that street children work their way through all barriers that exist in the streets and it is amazing how they manage to negotiate their existence despite hostility and brutality that they face on the streets. Their use of space and places remain interesting for research because of the resilience they display as well as the risks they run.

3.17 Concluding remarks

This literature review suggests that defining street children is problematic in that street children are not a homogenous group and they exist in a continuum. Many authors and researchers often struggle with the common UNICEF categorisation of street children as 'on' and 'of' the street. Therefore, the definition of street children continues to evolve in an attempt to define street children. The above categorisation does not fit all children who

have something to do with the street, for example, those who live with their families on the streets. Thus, street children remain a hotly contested and debated social construct.

It is evident from the literature that street children have existed in North and Latin America Europe and Asia for much longer than in many African countries. In Zimbabwe, it was unheard of prior to Independence that children could live on the streets on their own. It was not a feature of traditional society which had a strong kinship and extended family network which supported children and other less fortunate members of the society. It was not until the late 1980s that residents of cities like Bulawayo woke up to the reality of children living and working on the streets on a more permanent basis and since then the problem has been growing. Like in many other countries there are no accurate figures on numbers of street children at local and national level. Nonetheless, there seems to be a consensus in literature on the causes and reasons for children to live and work on the streets ranging from poverty, parental neglect and abuse to effects of HIV/AIDS and armed conflicts particularly in some African countries.

The term 'street children' has been used in many settings because it is easy to understand for many people although it is also seen as labelling and marginalizing children. Street children have various names across the world and most of them are derogatory and lead to unfair treatment that they receive. They are viewed (largely) by the public and authorities as lawless and a threat to social harmony.

Street children are a social construct and in the same manner childhood is in itself a social construction. Street children have shown (over the years) an amazing ability to enter public spaces and places and negotiate their way amidst all the hostility and the brutality of street life. They are socially excluded from main stream society and their rights as proclaimed in international and national legislation are often ignored. Although the international legislation (UNCRC,1989) states what rights a child can assert and lay claim to, this is

difficult for many children, more so for street children in the developing world and in many a society where the child has no voice.

In the case of street children in Bulawayo there is very little research focusing on their life experiences yet they have been a feature of the urban landscape for over two decades and do not seem to be going away. It would appear there is very little understanding about them hence the need for more research into what is going on as opposed to research which has sought to identify the causes, numbers and solutions to the problem. Therefore, a child-standpoint approach that values engaging with children directly through child-centred research methods such as drawings , mapping, photographs where possible and individual narratives from semi-structured interviews seems a viable and the most appropriate for means to address the major questions arising from the literature review.

Chapter Four: Methodology

'For one thing, choices of research strategy, design, or method have to be dovetailed with the specific research question being investigated... if we are interested in the world views of members of a certain social group, a qualitative research strategy that is sensitive to how participants interpret their social world may be the direction to choose' (Bryman, 2004:23).

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the methodology for the study, its justification, theoretical and ethical considerations, informed consent and choices leading to data analysis which is further explored in Chapter Five. The aim of the study is to develop an understanding of the life experiences of street children in their social environment and is based upon the fundamental assumption that human beings are the creators of their social world and meanings but not necessarily in the contexts of their own choosing (Marx, 1852). It attempts to capture the perspective of street children and to find out how they see the world around them; how they define the situation or environment they live in and what it means to them. Creswell (1994) argues that a study of a particular social problem calls for a specific or particular approach and the choice is dependent on the research problem and the audiences for whom one seeks to write.

4.2 The theoretical framework

I used four key terms suggested by Creswell (1994) as providing a major link to qualitative methodology. These four terms are to 'explore', 'understand', 'examine' and 'describe' data generated in the study. An ethnographic approach fits well with these terms in that the participants (street children) were central to the study and their stories told by them in a way that they understand their lives. Treating children as autonomous social actors enable children's views to be explored through recording their life stories as well as observing

them at different times and places doing their day-to-day activities. This approach seeks to avoid a tendency for children's views to be presented by adults with very little contribution by children themselves who were directly involved in the study. The study was guided by the importance of listening to their views and valuing their narratives as individuals who possess hopes and dreams for their future as well as taking responsibility for themselves and engaging in a daily struggle for survival.

4.3 Ethnography

This research adopted an ethnographic approach. There are many types of ethnographic research (ranging from anthropological ethnography to virtual ethnography), and thus, as a result, many commentators and writers on ethnography tend to focus on the processes rather than a precise definition of ethnography. The key component of ethnography is in what ethnographers do in terms of data collection such as participating (covertly or overtly) in people's daily lives for an extended period of time (Hamersley and Atkinson, 2007; Bryman, 2004), watching what is happening and listening to what is said as well as asking questions through formal and informal interviews. Ethnographers also draw on a range of sources of data. According to Punch (1998:160) *'Ethnography means, literally, a picture of the way of life of some identifiable group of people. Conceivably, those people could be any culture-bearing group, in any time and place'*. There has also been emphasis on the group being *'small, intact, essentially self-sufficient social unit and ... notable strange to the observer'* (Wolcott, 1998:188).

The form of ethnography employed was, as described by Silverman (1985), research involving observations of events and actions in natural contexts and which acknowledges the mutual interdependence of theory and data. Mack *et al* (2005:14) state that *'There is no substitute for witnessing or participating in phenomena of human interaction- interaction with other people, with space, with things, with states of being such as age and health*

status. Observing and participating are integral to understanding the breadth and complexities of the human experience'. Thus, in participant observation, researchers are able to observe participants in their social world (natural setting) as well as observe activities from 'outside' as objects of the world. The aim of the researcher is to capture quality data in the participants' own language, the everyday concepts that they use in telling the story of their daily lives (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). In other words participant observation seeks to find meanings to the 'hows' and 'whys' of human behaviour in the context of a setting where these behaviours are observed.

An example of the use of this approach is where Aharon-Gutman (2009) used ethnographic examples to show how inhabitants of Ashdod, Israel, consume the physical and social space of a modern city including how the inhabitants took over its physical structure and put into practice their own definitions of 'labour' and 'production'. Similarly, street children tend to do the same and by doing so they challenge the concept of the social order. They create their own definitions of 'home', 'family', 'consumption' and 'work'. In other words, participants are the expert practitioners of their own lives and the ethnographer learns from them to find out how they are connected to what is visible to them (Smith, 2002).

The above features are salient in this research which conceives street children as autonomous 'social actors' in order to explore how they negotiate space and place; how they engage with their social environment and contest their ascribed or imposed identity; how they understand concepts of 'space' and 'sense of place' including their work on the streets of Bulawayo. Atkinson and Hammersley's (2007) idea of focusing on a few cases and a single setting with a group of street children easily identifiable by the unique identity of spending their time on the streets and living in the street (in small groups within a larger street children population) was the key to choosing ethnography.

Such a close relationship ensues between the researcher and the participants and carries an advantage of observing ‘what is going on’, listening to what is said and also provides the opportunity to seek explanations about certain events or particular behaviours during the course of the study. Creswell (2003:181) provides a detailed overview of qualitative research stating that *‘it takes place in the natural setting thus enabling the researcher to develop a level of detail about the individual or place and allows for the actual experience of participants to be explored’*. This approach strengthened the aim of the study to capture the perspective and actions of the participants (Alverson and Skoldberg, 2000; Neuman, 2006) and carried within it the element of dialogue about those experiences that enables the researcher to explore, understand, describe and analyse the social phenomena under study. It is reasonable to argue that using ethnography (a qualitative approach) took into account the uniqueness of street children’s experiences and further deepens an understanding of this complex phenomenon.

4.4 Advantages of an ethnographic approach

The ethnographic approach adopted in this research study is drawn from the social constructionist approach which is allied to the hermeneutic tradition in the social sciences. For example, participant observation does not lay claim to uncover any form of external validity or generalisability; but rather, it seeks to uncover what Geertz (1984) terms as the ‘thick description’ i.e. the detailed accounts of a particular social context, in this case the everyday experiences of street children in Bulawayo. This is (as Shaw 1999a points out) not because ethnography lacks the methodological capacity to render some form of generalisability, but for ethical reasons, it aims to reassert human agency in the process of social change. This factor is important, particularly within the context of the asymmetrical power relations that Bulawayo street children are involved in.

In order to understand the phenomenon of ‘street children’ there was a need to have dialogue with the participants who have a stake in the issue and have a better understanding of their social world and meanings. Marshall and Rossman (1999) list a number of benefits for employing a qualitative approach such as the ability to identify and describe the complexity of social problems; the ability to identify unanticipated outcomes of policies and helping to demystify policy as well as providing a way to study problems in cases in which experimental methods would not be appropriate or would be unethical.

A further justification for adopting an ethnographic approach is in order to obtain some temporal and contextually confined knowledge about how street children ‘negotiate’ issues of space and place. Thus, this research may not be generalisable to other groups of street children around the globe or even other parts of Zimbabwe. Conversely, the study sought to uncover some commonalities in the negotiated use of space and place by street children. By ‘negotiation’ I mean the way they strategically position themselves or manipulate the social environment to their own advantage with little or minimum disruption to the existing order although at times they may deliberately employ aggressive tactics to get their way.

Flick (2009) sums up the advantages of qualitative studies in that they can reveal how people experience and think about events and social relations. Maykut and Morehouse (1994:19) further strengthened this argument by stating that *‘the aim is to capture what people say and do, that is, the product of how people interpret the world’*. This theoretical approach develops theory from data systematically gathered and analysed. There is interplay between data collection and the analysis phase as the theory evolves during the research process. Finally, the approach adopted in this study provides the researcher with an opportunity to stay close to participants and thus access and observe the experiences as they happen or from the participants’ perspective.

4.5 Disadvantages of an ethnographic approach

Despite its capacity for uncovering the ‘thick description’, ethnography is not without its problems. For example, Bourdieu (1991) criticises the kind of ethnography that emerged from anthropological and oriental studies in French colonial Africa. He condemned what he termed ‘subjective reflexivity’ where the researcher claimed to reflect critically on the power dynamics between themselves and the research participants, and the capacity for researcher bias and then attempt to retain the narratives of the research participants at the centre of the research process. However, in reality what happened was that, through the process of conceptualisation of ‘the narratives’ and choice of research methods these narratives became the product of the researcher’s social construction with his or her discursive slant and hence it was the researcher’s explanation of the of events that became the central focus, with the research participants’ voices relegated to the periphery. Thus, two key challenges in this process were to avoid the relegation of the street children’s narratives and avoiding the problems of adultism (the discrimination against children by adults) in the research. This was averted by use of their exact words in the interpretation of the findings.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical principles in research with children and vulnerable participants dictate that they must be protected (Punch, 2002) and should be handled with sensitivity. Research with children does not offer easy paths to achieving the above and research participants like street children have painful memories or experiences and need a high level of sensitivity on the part of the researcher. While the methods that were employed in this study may appear less intrusive as they rely on people telling their stories at their own pace, there is a potential that respondents could be distressed. While the study takes a perspective that sees children as competent commentators and experts on their own lives (Prout, 2002; Dunn,

2004), that does not mean that research with children should be conducted in the same way as research with adults. Potential differences that arise from children's marginalised positions and the way in which childhood is constructed and marginal identities of street children need to be recognised.

Punch (2002:2) poses a question: *'If children are competent social actors, why are specific 'child-friendly' methods needed to communicate with them?'* The answer to the above question is that children have a shorter attention span; use and understand language differently and have less life experience compared to adults (Punch, 2002). This recognition implies that research should be based on their level of understanding and how they view their own world.

Four research perspectives on childhood have a fundamental part to play in research with children. The first is the 'child as an 'object' perspective which is dominant in the medical and psychological research (Edwards and Alldred, 1999). This perspective regards children as having no or lacking human agency and being acted upon by adults. The second perspective sees children as 'subjects'. This implies children's subjectivity and a tendency to make assumptions about their competencies in relation to adults and their families (Woodhead and Faulkner, 2000).

The 'child as a social actor' is the third perspective and places emphasis on the independent autonomy of children in respect of their own unique experiences and their understanding of these experiences (Christensen and Prout, 2002). This model seeks to strike a balance between recognising and developing the competency and autonomy of children while at the same time developing practices appropriate to children's experiences, interests and routines. The fourth perspective sees children as 'co-researchers' (Alderson, 2000). These perspectives underpin the choice of research methods and processes that are followed in conducting research with children. This research adopted the 'child as a social

actor' perspective which is deemed appropriate in exploring the life experiences of street children.

Christensen and Prout (2002) call for 'ethical symmetry' in research with children, i.e., a view that the ethical relationship between the researcher and the informant is the same whether he or she conducts research with adults or children as the same ethical principles apply. Christensen and Prout (2002) argue that each individual right and ethical consideration in relation to adults has its equivalent for research with children. There is a strong argument against age or developmentally based assumptions about children's competencies as ethical symmetry starts from the position of equality. This is important in issues like voluntary informed consent, confidentiality and the right to withhold participation. It is important to recognise any participant's right to say 'no' whatever their age.

Christensen and Prout's (2002) 'ethical symmetry' concept and assumptions are based on cognitive and developmental differences between children and adults. They attempt to strike a balance between acknowledging and recognizing the children's agency (competency and autonomy of children) on one hand and on the other employing research practices that are suitable for children's active participation in their own right.

The fundamental emphasis is that research should be in line with the children's experiences, interests, values and everyday routines. This research perspective's (children as social actors) particular characteristic is that children are given central and conceptual status and no longer seen solely as part of the family, school, social institutions and relationships which portray them as very dependent on them. They must be seen as social actors whose interaction with other structures changes them, the social and the cultural world they live in. Nonetheless, it should be noted that viewing children as social actors and competent agents with their own expression has created ethical dilemmas and

responsibilities for researchers. There is also a greater potential for conflict of interest between children and other actors.

It was therefore important to adopt ethical guidelines which are in line with the above perspective of children and research participants in general. In this study I followed a number of published ethical guidelines in line with the fundamental principle of recognizing children as social agents and active participants in the research process (a child-centred approach). Among these are the widely cited Declaration of Helsinki adopted by the World Medical Assembly in 1964, later amended in 1989 and 1996, the British Sociological Association (BSA); the British Educational Research Association (BERA), the Open University Code of Practice for Research and those conducting Research and the Open University governance documents on Ethics and Principles for Research involving Human Participants. These protocols set out principles and guidelines for research, responsibilities to participants, and responsibilities to sponsors of research and how data from the research should be handled and used. Providing information about the research, informed consent, confidentiality and use of research data gathered are some of the fundamentals of protecting participants (more of this later).

The protocols stipulate the need for adequate and accurate information to be provided to participants about the research and what their role will be in the research; that participation should be voluntary and participants should be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage for any reason or no reason. The British Educational Research Association's (2004, Section 9) revised guidelines state that the researcher should '*Operate within the ethic of respect for any persons involved directly or indirectly in the research they are undertaking, regardless of age, sex, religion, political beliefs and lifestyles or any other significant difference between such persons and the researcher or other participants in the research*'.

This respect ethic not only relates to the person, but also to the knowledge, democratic values and rights of individual participant. The principle, therefore, implies voluntary informed consent, confidentiality and privacy which are cornerstones in research with human participants. The Open University Code of Practice for Research and those Conducting Research also touches on the fundamental requirement for researchers to treat participants with respect and ensuring the safety of participants.

In order to meet the requirements of the protocols, prior to starting the interviews I gathered information on local resources for support and had them on hand when needed. I recognised my limitations and expertise to deal with issues where child participants can be affected by the research process. Skanfors (2009) talks of the necessity of having 'ethical radars' throughout the research process and also to recognise that children have other ways of expressing acceptance, rejection and withdrawal rather than just verbalizing. This is particularly relevant in the context of street children who could be sensitive to an intrusion into their space.

I ensured that participants understood that participation was voluntary by providing adequate and accurate information (by way of explanation) in a language easily understandable by participants and had the information sheet to give those who would have wanted something in writing. However, written text may not work for street children due their circumstances, that is, having no secure place of their own and being on the move constantly. In addition to the above protocol, I was guided by the British Sociological Association research protocol which sets out ethical markers in terms of relationships with research participants including protecting their rights, interests and sensitivities and, in equal measure, acknowledging the difficulty of balancing conflicting interests. The relationship with street children should be based on trust and respect for participants. It is important for researchers to use 'their' skills and information that could be understood by

the child as well as their judgments to assess the child's capacity to understand what is being put forward to them.

4.7 Power imbalance between the participant child and adult researcher

Street children are one of the most vulnerable groups of human participants. As with most relationships between children and adults in general, there is a power imbalance between the participant child and adult researcher. As Punch (2002) postulates, children are used to having their lives dominated and controlled by adults. They tend to expect adults' power over them rather than being treated as equals by adults. Similarly, children in Zimbabwean society are expected to hold anyone older in a position of respect and the relationships are on the basis of ageism. For example, it is common that all male adults assume a 'fatherly' role in society and tend to be addressed as such. To address this aspect I adopted Punch's (2002) suggestion that a way of confronting generational issues is by respecting and listening to children as competent social actors. Oates (2006) makes the point about the importance of recognizing children's abilities to understand and comprehend research and its purpose. The position of researcher may imply that one is knowledgeable and in the Zimbabwean context that may lead to expectations that may not benefit the research.

For some participants it seemed to be an attraction to talk to someone from the United Kingdom and also may have carried an expectation that they will get some material benefit from the engagement. On the other hand the perceived affluence and being an adult or authority figure, may have made them want to comply or even avoid participating in the research. This dilemma was dealt with by stating at the onset that the relationship was solely for the purposes of the research, as well as explaining what the researcher could and could not do. There was a possibility that lack of incentives /gains or their past experience with researchers (if negative) may lead to refusals to co-operate. While not dismissing such issues I always sought to draw participants to the core focus of the study; to gather

meaningful data as accurately as possible. This applied mainly to recorded interviews and a written exercise about 'My Space', a social work tool used to ascertain children's wishes and feelings through drawings and written statements about themselves.

There is a large social work research literature on communicating with children at their level and understanding which mitigates the child-adult dynamic. This can be achieved by adjusting to situations that arise during the course of engagement with participants. For example, the age of participants could mean they would do better with drawings or playing games. Adjustments enabled the participants to provide valuable information while doing what they like most. In a street environment the choices of what they would like to do are limited. Hence the drop-in centre became the meeting point from where rapport and trust was built. The adult-child gap narrowed as the relationship strengthened. Seeking explanations from participants ensured that the narratives reflected the views of participants. As social actors, participants had an influence on the flow of the data gathering. By allowing street children to operate the recorder or playing back the interview, the researcher generated their interest in the study as opposed to the idea of them just providing answers to questions posed by the researcher.

At the end of the research I want to go back and disclose the results to the participants and seek feedback. However, it is anticipated that some of the participants may have moved on as street children's circumstances change from time to time. It is therefore not always possible to do so with individual participants. It was evident during the second phase that some street children had moved on and would be difficult to trace as they have many options including crossing the border into South Africa. A summary of the findings will be made available to Thuthuka Street Children Project to share with the Bulawayo Task Force on Street Children and others.

4.8 Approaching the field

At the design stage of the study I identified an organisation doing direct work with children '*of the street*' in Bulawayo as a starting point to look at the phenomenon under study. I used my knowledge of Bulawayo and contacts at Thuthuka Street Children Project (a Scripture Union initiative). It turned out that they were the only organisation in Bulawayo with direct contact with this group of children mainly through a Drop-in Centre located at the Scripture Union offices on the edge of the Commercial Business District. Thuthuka (meaning 'To Rise Up') was formed in 1995 when an abandoned child came to the Scripture Union offices in Bulawayo for assistance. In August 2013, over 1500 children have been assisted through Thuthuka. According to Nomusa Chikari, the Field Officer (2011-2013) the primary goal is to build a relationship of trust with these children in order to work with them and progress towards reunifying them with their families. This is achieved through the Contact Centre (in the City) and the Training Centre (on the outskirts of the City).

As stated earlier Thuthuka Street Children Project has since remained a key partner of the Bulawayo City Council's Task Force on Street. Their Contact Centre (see picture on page 87 of the thesis) served as a starting point for both field visits and initial contacts with street children. Relationship building was made possible by meeting the majority of the target group for the study at the centre almost on a daily basis. The Centre is open for children living on the streets from Monday to Friday between 8.00 am and 5.00 pm and is closed during weekends and Bank Holidays. They also operate a Training Centre on the outskirts of the city which is a safe or boarding house for former street children who gave up life on the streets voluntarily. The children are re-integrated into local schools and rehabilitation to families explored where possible.

Figure 7. Thuthuka Contact Centre



Source: Picture of Board of rules (13/12/11)

Street children use the space behind the Scripture Union Building. The board of rules is used to remind the street children the expectations while on the premises. This is one place that the majority of street children identify with and can access five days a week.

Figure 8: Source: Thuthuka Contact Centre premises picture taken on 13/08/13



The initial estimate figures of street children were provided by the organisation. Thuthuka Street Children Project takes and keeps details of those who come to the Contact Centre at the point of first contact. In December 2011 the Field Officer at Thuthuka Street Children Project put the number of children living on the streets (street based) in Bulawayo at 32 (30 boys and two girls). Thuthuka Street Children Project is one place in Bulawayo where more reliable information about street children can be obtained as they have regular if not daily contact with a sizeable number of street children and homeless youths. There is a possibility that others may choose not to come to the Centre and they would only be seen during street visits.

The number of children living on the streets of Bulawayo during the first fieldwork was lower than it could have been at any given time due to efforts by Thuthuka Street Children Project which accommodated 39 boys and seven girls (all former street children) of primary and secondary school age at Thuthuka Training Centre. This group of children was away on a month long camping trip outside Bulawayo during the first field visit. During the second field visit in August 2013, Thuthuka Training Centre had 20 children (13 boys and seven girls); most of them came straight from the streets. It was informed by the Field Officer that in 2013 eleven children were rehabilitated back into their families of origin under a six months UNICEF sponsored reunification programme and others have left Bulawayo for a variety of reasons either for other cities, returned home on their own accord or went to South Africa.

4.9 Gaining access to the research site and participants

For every research project gaining access is always an issue that needs careful prior planning to avoid what Feldman *et al* (2003: vii) suggests '*often comes as a rude surprise to researchers who have not anticipated the difficulties that would be involved*'. Bryman (2004) considers gaining access to a social setting as one of the key and yet most difficult

steps in ethnographic research. One route to gain access to the research site would have been through the Department of Social Welfare under whose remit all children under the age of 18 and living on the streets would fall. Such a route was not favourable for a number of reasons: bureaucracy being one of them and that would have brought in unnecessary delays and it would not necessarily mean permission would be granted. Mbiba and Ndubiwa (2006) identified that conditions of insecurity for most institutions and even amongst individuals could make release of routine administrative information for research purposes a very sensitive matter. Coupled with that could be the reluctance of key informants to release information unless there is a direct financial benefit to themselves or their institutions.

A lot of preliminary planning, therefore, went into the aspect of gaining access to the research site (Bulawayo) and access to street children whose lives are, by nature, characterized by fluidity. My previous experience of working as a social worker in Bulawayo in the late 1990s and involvement in the Bulawayo Task Force on Street Children was valuable in planning access to both the research site and street children. By talking to former colleagues in the Bulawayo City Council's Community Services department, I was able to establish that Thuthuka Street Children Project was probably the only organisation working directly with street children living on the streets in Bulawayo.

Preliminary contacts were made with Thuthuka Street Children Project about my research project soon after registration (through emails). The organisation agreed to open up their facilities for the research project. Finally, arrangements were made with the organisation after I obtained ethical approval from the Open University's Research Ethics Committee in July 2011. One of the Ethics Committee's requirements was that there should be a way of assisting street children who may be traumatized by the research. Arrangements were made with Thuthuka Street Children's Project who provided an experienced member of staff (the Project's Co-ordinator) to be the key person to deal with such issues should they arise. The

Co-ordinator was not involved in the day-to-day hands on dealings with street children. On a day-to-day basis I dealt with the Field Officer and Outreach Workers.

Children living on the streets occupy public space and public places where their activities attract public scrutiny as the 'bad child' image follows them all the time. Studying the phenomenon of street children requires access to both 'public' and 'private' space and places. Access to public space and places (alleys, public bars, shops, etc.) does not necessarily require negotiation to enter because, in principle, anyone can enter or access such public domains. However, there are other considerations with regards to public domains which may be marked by styles of social interaction which Goffman (1971) terms 'civil inattention', that is when persons are present together in the same situation they may engage each other in a talk, display respectful behaviour in a particular setting as well as treating others present with civil inattention in order. Therefore it was important to manage one's presence should that need explaining as well as being mindful of hanging around street children which could have been misconstrued for being anything to being an undercover security agent or reporter or even a predator.

Zimbabwe is generally a country always on the lookout for anything coming from outside that may destabilise the country further as there has been conflict with countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Europe and the United States (GoZ,2005:25c). Gaining access to participants, particularly street children, in Bulawayo was problematic due to the prevailing political situation where there is suspicion of anyone doing some questioning or taking notes or recording conversations in public places. Zimbabwe's tough media laws made it difficult to take pictures or make recordings at government buildings or installations without permission from the authorities. This tends to extend to scrutiny of anyone taking pictures or interviews in public places. The planning took into account the experiences of others who have ventured into researching sensitive issues in Zimbabwe. One notable experience was a recent documentary on '*Zimbabwe's Forgotten Children*' by

film maker Xoliswa Sithole (<http://truevisiontv.com/films/details/65/zimbabwes-forgotten-children>) which highlighted the scrutiny by the police/security agencies of conversational activities in open spaces and places. Sometimes, this borders on paranoia and irrational behaviour even when there is no threat posed. It would be folly for anyone to get on the wrong side of the state security agencies in Zimbabwe known for their notoriety and high-handedness. Therefore, locating myself within a well-known street children organization like Thuthuka Street Children Project was an escape route from such scrutiny.

The possibility of working as a volunteer with Thuthuka Street Children Project was attractive as it would enable direct interaction with street children through participating in activities at the centres as well as going out with Outreach Workers into the streets. This idea was used by Wakatama (2007) in his research on children's rights in Zimbabwe. Working as a volunteer carried an advantage in enabling the building of rapport and trust with street children. However, in any event, this option was not necessary as there were many opportunities to access participants throughout the research period.

On arrival I had a briefing from the Field Officer who provided an insight into what lay ahead such as how to approach street children, their core activities and the problems they face on the streets. My research plan was then refined incorporating activities that would be ideal to observe. I was mindful that gatekeepers, in this case, Thuthuka Street Children Project would be concerned about how I will see and present their organisation as a researcher and the picture that the study would paint. I positioned my study firmly in terms of studying the activities of street children rather than what the organisation was doing with and for street children.

4.10 Informed consent and dissent

It is important for any study to demonstrate how consent was obtained and it is, indeed, one of the guiding principles for Ethics Committees when deliberating the issue before any

study can commence. Informed consent in research with children is always a delicate issue, and more so with street children who have no adults to give the consent on their behalf.

The international standard and legal requirements on who is a child are set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which defines a child as any person under the age of 18 years and they are considered as vulnerable (Newell, 1991). Emphasis is, therefore, placed on the individual child or young person's competence to give consent. Hutz *et al* (1995) state that the idea of informed consent is to have parents or guardians to give consent including deciding whether participation in the research itself is appropriate for a specific child as they know the child well, care for and love the child. Such a perspective is paternalistic and disempowering and leads to a form of adultism.

This is how Masson (2000:39) puts it: *'A child who has the capacity to understand fully a decision affecting his or her life automatically has the capacity to make that decision unless statute law states otherwise'*. This resonates with what has become known in the United Kingdom as the Gillick Competency Test and Fraser guidelines which arose from the legal case in 1985 where the British Courts ruled that those under 16 years could consent to medical treatment once they showed sufficient understanding and an ability to make what is deemed as sensible choices (Willow, 2002). Mr. Justice Lord Wolf's original judgment on the Gillick case in 1985 partly reads:

'...The child must be capable of making a reasonable assessment of advantages and disadvantages of the treatment proposed so the consent, if given, can be properly and fairly described as true consent'.

The above has been widely applied to help assess a child's maturity and competency to make their own decisions and to understand the inherent implications of those decisions. It is worthy considering other views on the subject of consent before applying the principles to street children in social research situations like in this study.

There is a supposition put forward by Coyne (2010) who states that parental consent is not always necessary in social research. Valid as this argument could be, it runs into complications in terms of the law which is complex on the issue of consent as stated earlier in reference to the UNCRC (Wiles *et al*, 2005). In many countries, Zimbabwe included, (signatory to the UNCRC and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child), a child under 16 is not legally competent to give consent. However, as stated earlier, for research purposes in England and Wales and Northern Ireland parental consent is not required if a child or a young person understands what their participation in research involves. One could adopt a view advanced by David *et al* (2001) that it has to be more about providing the child or young participant with sufficient knowledge about the research process such as what is involved, what will be their role and what will happen with their information.

The idea of parental consent is intended to protect child participants from harmful effects of the research process and is based on the assumption that children do not have the capacity to make informed decisions. For example notions of informed consent in social research are sometimes influenced by assumptions about their levels of competence and that this can be determined scientifically. Edwards and Alldred (1999) are highly critical of both medical and psychological approaches that attempt to determine a specific chronological age when children are able to give informed consent to research. David *et al*, (2001) argue against principles grounded in developmental assumptions and chronological age and ability. A good example is the accepted view that children aged 16 years of age are deemed more competent to consent than those aged 15 years. There are other factors in play when it comes to competence such as one's social experiences. This aspect is relevant to street children who must make crucial decisions about their lives without adult guidance or influence.

Morrow and Richards (1996) assert that chronological age and competence are not synonymous and there are no abstract, universal ethical rules that can be adopted uncritically and followed in empirical research with children. Rather what should be avoided (in order to avoid adultism) is the tendency to regard childhood as ‘fixed’ or as an ‘in between’ stage between birth and adulthood and a universal, as opposed to a culture specific, phenomenon that varies in time and place and with the lived experiences of the child. It is, therefore, imperative to set markers under which consent was sought for this study. This aspect is explored in detail in the next section.

4.11 The standard measure for consent

The issue of consent in this study was linked to what participants were consenting to. The general question that should be asked when determining whether parents/carers or children should consent to participate is ‘*Are children able to reflect upon and take decisions for participation in research?*’ This question was considered within the power dynamics inherent in the engagement process underpinning the research and located in the wider discourses on childhood which often tend to marginalize children from adult discussions regarding their well-being. As Edwards and Alldred (1999) point out the real empowerment of children in any research process is accepting when they say ‘no’ to research participation and adopt what is termed ‘informed dissent’ (Edwards and Alldred 1999:226).

The fundamental assumption for this research was that the participants had a ‘capacity’ to understand their situations and were better placed to tell their story in their own way. This was based on the notion of children as autonomous social actors. It is acknowledged that the issue of consent in research with children, in general, raises issues of power imbalance (the issue of power imbalance was dealt with in subsection 4.7) and children’s abilities to comprehend research and reasons for the research (Stainton Rogers, 2006). More important

is the negative experiences of childhood and risk of long term psychological harm for participants. This is possible with street children who will have gone through traumatic childhoods and some questions may bring these experiences to the fore. It was of necessity to ensure that participants understood what they were being asked to consent to and that participation was voluntary.

The introduction at the beginning of the first fieldwork (carried on to the second phase) provided the basis for ‘consensual engagement’ with the group of participants. In keeping with access to groups of participants in an ethnographic study was the idea of relaying (initial) information about the research verbally through professional gatekeepers (Robson, 2002; Silverman, 2000) and repeated verbally by the researcher throughout the fieldwork phases with explanations as to what would happen to the information provided by participants. I had an information sheet (with information about the study) and a consent form (Miller and Bell, 2002; Robson, 2002; Silverman, 2000). The explanations given at the beginning and throughout the life of the fieldwork was that participation was voluntary and that participants reserved the right to withdraw any time they felt like. It was the case that after the first introduction those who felt they wanted to talk to me made the move and as time passed on they volunteered their experiences.

Consent was negotiated at different times and circumstances such as when intending to access places that they deemed to be out of bounds for non-street children. One has to identify *controlled space* where street children hold sway as to what comes in and what does not go beyond certain or imposed group or individual barriers. For example, consent to visit some bases was negotiated with those who wield power within the group such as base leaders. Their consent was shared within the group as there was no resistance from others after they agreed for visits to be made to their respective places of abode. Suffice to say that ethnographic research carries an element of intrusion into personal and private

space and one has to be careful not take for granted the individual's or group's consent at any point.

Consent for the interviews was sought from potential participants with a full explanation of the nature and context of the interviews. This was done by providing a full explanation verbally stating the research objectives, the need for their information and what would happen to their information. A written explanation in the form of an information sheet (see Appendix Two , page 272 of the thesis) was provided (for those able and willing to read) stating the purpose and objectives of the study; how, where and why it will be carried out and what will happen to information given by participants. In most instances a verbal explanation was sufficient for consent.

4.12 Confidentiality

The limits to confidentiality were explained in that exceptions would be made where information provided suggest that there was a risk to the participant or any other individual. Interviews were conducted only after ascertaining that the participants understood the reason for the request for their information and that their participation was voluntary. There were three occasions where verbal consent was sought and obtained but the timing was not right to do the interviews and chances were missed because of change of circumstances the next day. For example, one of the boys who had been on the streets for more than a decade was under the influence of glue on the day agreed to record an interview while two other boys left Bulawayo before I could get a chance to record interviews. Seeking individual consent was a process which evolved through observations and conversations and it was mainly with those who showed a willingness to share their experiences.

One interesting aspect of the interviews was that only one participant signed a consent form in addition to a verbal agreement to do the interview. The rest were content giving

verbal consent. There was a need during the interviews to continually check that participants were happy to continue to talk about their life experiences. One has to have one's 'ethical antenna' on all the time, that is, to be alert to any distress arising from any disclosures made by participants during the interview. The flow of the interview was dictated by the participants especially as to what they felt comfortable to talk about. As a precaution, during interviews or any research activities, I planned to stop the interview process if a participant appeared distressed. If not able to proceed they would be asked for their consent to continue the interview another time. This did not happen at all, however, throughout the research. A provision was in place also for any participant distressed by the research process to talk to a designated and experienced member of staff (the Project Co-Coordinator) at Thuthuka Street Children Project who would then consider options available for counselling at local level or with the charities working with street children.

Verbal consent was obtained to take pictures of their bases and personal photographs. Assurances were given that wherever such pictures were used they would be pixelated and any features that might show identity would not be shown. Assurances were also given that a high level of confidentiality would be maintained around their information which would be anonymized to conceal their true identities. In most case, street children took my camera and took photographs which they wanted me to keep for the research. All the participants for all the twenty interviews understood the context of their participation and participated freely and provided information that they were comfortable to share about their life experiences.

4.13 Sampling and sample size

Sampling is an important element of research and it is important for any research project to mark or explain the parameters of the study. It is imperative to note that the phenomenon under study (children living on the streets) is very complex and fluid which makes

sampling difficult. There was no defined sample for the study and decisions had to be made as to who to target (for participant observations, interviews and drawings), when and where to observe and how data is captured. I adopted what Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:35) call '*three major dimensions along which sampling of cases takes place: time, people and context*'. Due to the fluidity, it was crucial to start the process by accessing known contact points such as places that they frequent (in this case the drop-in-centre). This brings in the concerns about timing in terms of when the participants were active such as before lunch, observing activities at alleys and other places at different times of the day. It was also necessary to cover both genders and decisions had to be made such as when and where to access girls (in particular) as literature points to few numbers of girls on the streets compared to boys (Marima *et al.*, 1995). The objectives were to access different situations as well as observe different kinds of behaviours on the streets. The process then moved on to direct contact with the prospective participants.

As a general rule, planning and mapping the research exercise took into account the prevailing conditions and circumstances in the research site. As stated earlier in the literature review no one knows the actual numbers of street children around the world let alone in Bulawayo. As a matter of fact I identified my main research group based on the UNICEF definition 'of the streets', that is, a group of street children who live on the streets, work and sleep on the streets in order to capture a wide spectrum of experiences. The study focused on this group of street children and through immersion (embedding) for a reasonable period each day it was possible to establish a sense of the features and characteristics of participants. The larger group was targeted for participant observations, field and site visits. Interview participants were drawn from the large group by way of targeting those available and deemed to be knowledgeable about street life.

Based on literature available from previous studies on street children it was possible to work out estimates in terms of numbers as well as plan to develop a reasonable sample on

the ground. This projection was that they would be at least between 30 to 100 children living on the streets at any one given time. It turned out that children living on the streets at any time during the two field work phases ranged between 30 and 70. A total of 42 (36 boys and six girls) were accessible and basic details were collated for demographic purposes. Amongst them I included seven former street children because of their valuable knowledge of life on the streets. They were still living on the streets with the younger street children and did not see themselves as anything other than 'street children' despite their chronological age and the law defining them as adults. I also included former street children who had returned home and used to come over to the centre to meet with former colleagues. From this sample (of between 30 and 70 children, mainly boys) evidence was sought to explore the assumptions made in the research and literature on street children. By capturing their stories in their own words the study sought to document their experiences for a thematic analysis.

A total of 20 participants were selected for semi-structured interviews while six participants were asked to write about their lives or draw pictures depicting their life experiences on the street using 'My Space' concept. Photographs were taken from the research site and field visits during the life of the study to complement the data and provide quality data sufficient to tell the story of their life experiences. This decision was based on the premise of selecting those individuals and settings that can generate/provide data required to answer the research questions which is the most significant consideration in qualitative sampling decisions (Maxwell, 1996). The aim was to capture a diverse spectrum of experiences of individual street children and groups by analyzing individual and group data. This enables the researcher to study particular aspects and salient features of the individual and groups with a view of gaining a much deeper understanding of the phenomenon of street children.

The value of data from a study of this nature lies in presentation of meanings and constructs as seen by participants and the findings are generalized in relation to the group being studied rather than generalisability of the findings. Rich experiences were captured from the interviews and observations and these were complemented by field and site observations, thus, paving a way to present the findings in a thematic form using extracts from the individual interviews and what came out of observations. The sample provided rich data and a wide range of individual and group experiences whose quality would be further explored in the next sections relating data collection methods employed.

4.14 Selection and identification of research participants

As stated in the sampling subsection above, the sampling of respondents for a study of this nature is based on a purposeful criteria rather than random chance. Such purposeful sampling is quite different from the random sampling used to draw statistical probabilities in quantitative research. Statistical sampling is based on randomness so that researchers can confidently generalize results from a small sample to a larger population. In this research it is the power of purposeful sampling that lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth analysis related to the central issues being studied.

Choosing participants is an important element of this study; hence, the selection was on the basis that participants had special knowledge about the topic and their willingness to participate in the research. It also helps if they are ready to talk and they are somewhat reflective or analytical in their thinking. One major element was their representativeness as members of interest groups, or on the basis of any special social status accorded to them, either formally or informally within the group such as base leaders and blanket leaders.

Selection and recruitment was not primarily based on age, gender or ethnicity as these are not the defining characteristics of street children and they were not a primary focus of this study. However, the reality was that there were more boys than girls living on the streets at

any given time and therefore the majority of the participants were boys. Girls numbered at less than 10 at any given time (during the two fieldwork phases) and they were not easily accessible due to the manner in which they operate on the streets (always under control of their boyfriends and surfacing in the evening at pubs). The youngest children were about 11 years old and the oldest about 18 years old while the oldest of the former street children was just over 20 years of age. The important criteria for selection were on the basis of membership of an already existing group.

Chapter Five: Methods

5.1 Introduction

The study mainly employed participant observation and unstructured recorded interviews. These were complemented by sustained participant observations (conversational interviews both formal and informal), field visits and site visits and drawings by street children based on their experiences of life on the streets which were brought together to build or construct an ethnographic impression (Freire 1988; Freire, 1994; Young and Barrett, 2001).

Photographs of street children and street children's places were taken in order to capture moments of interest as experienced by street children. Such an engagement with street children required a significant degree of sensitivity to the fascinating social world of street children in Bulawayo. Some of the children's places are not places where 'ordinary' people would associate with due to the filth around them (such as Emkotweni which was the most popular alley-to be discussed further on the section on street children's places).

Fundamentally, I would argue that the methods employed in this study have strong interactive and humanistic elements with a clear emphasis on active engagement with participants. Moreover, it was important to build rapport and credibility with individuals (street children) without disturbing the research site any more than is necessary. The issue of trust in research with children is very important as Conticini (2008) argues that reliable information about street children cannot be gathered without a previous relationship of shared trust between street child and the researcher.

5.2 Research tools

Ethnographic interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder with a playback facility during the first fieldworker and a smart phone which attracted the participants' attention. Participants were interested in playing games and taking photographs with my smart phone. The photographs helped to capture some important moments and meaningful

actions for further exploration. During the second phase an iPhone was used to record some of the interviews and taking pictures. To cater for possible malfunction of the gadgets I had in my possession a digital camera as back-up. I had my notebook where I captured my thoughts and observations on a daily basis which were later recorded as part of a reflective diary. Details of each interview, time and place were recorded at the beginning and the end of the interview and these were automatically allocated an anonymous reference. Drawing paper (My Space) and pens were part of the research kit. My Space is where participants were asked to draw a picture or write anything about themselves and life on the streets on a sheet of paper with three circles (see Appendix 5). This approach frees the participants to choose what they want to say about themselves as opposed to answering questions in an interview. It worked across age groups and captures a visual picture of the interaction.

A football was purchased during the first field visit and proved valuable as participation in the match and kick about helped to form relationships with a lot of the boys who came to the Contact Centre. I took part in the kick about and got to know the names of team mates. I took puzzles with me but there was only one participant interested in these as they tend to keep participants at one place which is not possible for individuals who are always on the move. I had a consent form and an interview schedule which I used as a guide for interviews.

I had to keep the equipment safe after use in a secure office at Thuthuka Street Children Project. All data collected was stored electronically on my laptop while all paper based data was kept in a folder securely in an office. This made it easy to carry all the research material for analysis in the United Kingdom.

5.3 Fieldwork: Introduction

Fieldwork was split into two parts of about a month each in December 2011 to early January 2012 and August to early September 2013 (total number of days spent on fieldwork was 51 and a combined 276 hours). On average eight hours were spent in the field on most of the days and more hours for night visits. The first phase commenced after obtaining ethical approval and making contact with Thuthuka Street Children Project notifying them of my intention to visit Zimbabwe. This phase involved learning about the research participants and the research site and positioning oneself in order to be able to obtain rich quality data. This required immersion within the research environment as much as possible and interacting with participants at every opportunity. The second phase was more of consolidating the quality of data collected with a refined strategy based on messages learnt from the first phase.

5.4 Phase One: 10 December 2011 to 6 January 2012.

Initial access was negotiated indirectly through gatekeepers (the Field Officer and Outreach Workers) who are known and trusted by street children. The process started with an introduction to a group of street children at the Drop-in Centre by Nomusa Chikari (Field Officer) whom the children called '*Masalu*' (the English equivalent for Mother). The introduction was strategic in that it took place on the first day during lunch time when most of the children had come in for lunch. The introduction was very explicit that I was a researcher from the United Kingdom and would like to learn about their lives on the streets and that I was not an employee of the organisation. The duration of my stay was explained as lasting for a month. The researcher role was easy to explain as there were two students from two local universities on attachment and they were assigned tasks. This highlighted the difference in my role in that I was not going to do any tasks for the organisation, thus I was enabled to work on forming a researcher/participant relationship.

The next stage, after introduction, involved sitting around and chatting with street children at the Drop-in-Centre throughout the day and observing movements in and out of the centre. The interactions were about general issues and aimed at getting to know the participants. Some of the street children appeared guarded in their initial response to my presence amongst them. It became apparent that it was going to take some skillful negotiating in order to establish a meaningful working relationship. I positioned myself such that I was not going to ask any questions until a reasonable level of trust was established. As time went on they did not seem bothered about my presence as they went on with their daily activities of washing their clothes and chatting before and after lunch and then left for the town centre.

By the end of the first week I knew quite a number of the children by name and had formed a picture of friendship networks as well as a good idea of where they slept at night. I had the distinct advantage of speaking the two main languages spoken in Zimbabwe (Ndebele and Shona, though my proficiency in Shona is not as good as Ndebele which is my mother tongue). The flow of conversations revealed individual children's backgrounds and their activities on the streets.

Slowly but surely most of the children would approach me and have a chat at the drop-in-centre. By the second week they were referring to me as '*Lumez*', Ndebele slang for uncle or simple '*Mdala Ndlovu*' for Mr. Ndlovu. This distinction was an indication that they had accepted me as an insider /outsider (someone they can associate with, they had the full knowledge of what I was doing around them). In a way they had a sense of control or influence on the direction of the relationship and shared or disclosed information at the time of their own choosing.

The strategy employed throughout the fieldwork period was to go to the Drop-in Centre every day and spend the day talking to street children in order to get to know them.

Rapport and trust was slowly built by having a presence every day of the week (from morning to afternoon when the centre closed for business) except for Saturday and Sunday when the centre was closed. I adopted Junker's (2004:221) view that the *'fieldworker in order to initiate his observations, first goes about learning to enter the social situation and get along with the process he intends to observe'*. While 'physical access' (being around street children) happened on the first day, it took much longer to gain an insight into how they function as individuals and as a group. I spent up to 8 hours a day (from Monday to Friday) with street children either at the Drop-in-Centre or 'walking about' in the city centre or visiting sites and locations where they 'live' (places of abode-commonly known as bases). The total number of hours spent on research activities was 128 hours for the first phase.

Negotiating access was a continuous process throughout the fieldwork. The experience was similar to West's (1980:34) who says *'after a few visits or perhaps a couple of weeks, that ..., I became recognised as something of a regular, and usually had struck up conversations with a few youngsters'*. Wolf (1991) extends this view by suggesting that extensive *'hanging about'* along with lucky breaks was necessary in his experience with bikers in Alberta, Edmonton in his quest to obtain an insider perspective of the emotions and mechanics that underlie outlaw bikers' creation of subcultural alternative.

Accumulating knowledge about the terrain helped in mapping research strategies and decisions that were made depending on events or conditions on the ground.

Important knowledge about the field was generated during negotiations for access where group structures were revealed by participants such 'base leaders' and 'blanket leaders'. In turn questions were developed in order to find out more about these structures such as how does one become a base or blanket leader as well as what the roles entail. In the process fears around allowing access surfaced such as 'no cameras' at bases which were considered by street children as private space under the control of groups or individuals.

Drawing from Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) writings on ethnography, I adopted a practical approach and developed strategies to deal with every day observations and developing rapport with street children. The first few days were crucial as they were going to define and shape the direction that the study was going to take. Accessing a social setting in a study of this nature depends on whether it is 'open' or 'closed' space (Bryman, 2004). Hammersley (1995) makes a distinction between 'public' (open) and 'non-public' (closed) spaces such as school or agency. Gaining access to the former may not have restrictions while the latter would need permission before access is granted.

The street is generally open public space and place, but street children tend to have restrictions in accessing the streets or particularly parts of the city centre. There is a widely held view that street children are considered by some authorities illegitimate or have no legitimate claims to those space and places (Hecht, 1998; Young and Barrett, 2001). This is due to their marginal status, exclusion from public, social and spatial environments due to their status as minors and characteristics that are considered deviant by the mainstream population. This had an impact on research activities with street children and there was a need to make adjustments on the basis of conditions prevailing in the field such as maintaining a low profile and embedding myself with staff at Thuthuka Street Children Project particularly during the first phase. I kept in mind Hecht's (1998) experiences in his research with street children of North East Brazil, where he had encounters with law enforcement agents who ordered the interviewers to leave a particular area. The safety of participants and the researcher was of paramount importance and, therefore, an analysis of the conditions on the ground and planning was undertaken before commencing data collection.

Although children living on the streets occupy public space and public places, their activities attract public scrutiny as their 'bad child' image follows them all the time. Therefore, there are problems for anyone trying to engage with street children in public

places as this suddenly attracts the attention of passers-by and members of the public who may want to know what is happening. Street children tend to maximize opportunities that arise at any given time and therefore it may not be ideal to try to engage with them in open spaces and places.

The approach during this phase is in line with Christensen and Prout's (2002) view of children as social actors and working towards striking a balance (delicate as it is though) between recognition of their competency and autonomy with practices that correspond with their routines and life experiences. The relationship extended beyond the drop-in-centre to public places like their places of abode and general public places where I would stop and chat with them as and when I met them in the city centre. It took two weeks for the first interview to be formally recorded as I had to allow for trust and confidence building for the smooth running of the research process. It was at their pace and it was their experiences to share as and when they saw fit to do so. The issue of power dynamics between the researcher and research participants (street children) will be revisited later in the section on reflexivity and participation.

At every opportunity basic demographic data was gathered in the process of knowing each other (See Chapter Six of this thesis) and that helped locate each participant's background. Conversations would then move on to their arrival on the streets, their present circumstances and their perception of or their future aspirations. The first phase of the analysis was done manually by noting details regarding age, gender, family background including place of origin and reasons for leaving home on the margins of each transcript. The details were recorded under specific categories created for analysing demographic information (see section on demographics). The details were grouped together with a list of children seen and spoken to during the field visits (42 including 20 interviews). This was necessary to provide a snapshot of the street children's demographics due to the fluidity in

their life style which makes it difficult to keep tabs on exact numbers. It was not going to be possible to interview all the street children due to time limits and the nature of the study.

I was aware from the literature on street children around the world that exact numbers are not available and it was probable that Bulawayo was not going to be different as no large scale studies have been carried out on street children in Zimbabwe let alone Bulawayo.

Therefore, it was important that I had a picture of how many children lived on the streets of Bulawayo. I decided to devise my own way of working out the number of children living on the streets. During the first field visit in December 2011 to early January 2012 I monitored numbers and made direct observations by recording numbers of children attending the Contact Centre on days that I could possibly do a head count. Having acquainted myself with individuals and groups during the first field visit I was able to identify new faces as well as make enquiries from other street children if familiar faces were no longer seen in the town.

5.5 Phase Two: 9 August 2013 to 2 September 2013

During the second phase a more robust approach was developed on the basis of knowledge gained during the first phase. Gaining access was much easier in that there were still a sizeable number of familiar faces amongst the vast numbers who arrived after January 2012. I decided early in my preparations that I was going to maximise the time that I had by going into the streets to interact with street children at their places or wherever they were in the city. I set out to do things slightly differently building on the experiences from the first phase. The starting point was by re-establishing the relationships with the group of street children who were living in the streets in December 2011 and January 2012 as well as those who arrived later. I entered the research site with the confidence that I gained conducting research with a group of children I was seeing for the 'second time' and having

to re- establish a trusting relationship with the old group and new entrants while maintaining Thuthuka Drop-In Centre as the operational base.

The second phase started with catching up with street children at the Centre. The updates flowed smoothly concerning who was and was no longer around. I learnt about the changes that had taken place since the last visit and how life was different for street children from how it was the previous year. The state of the boys' appearance and clothing told a story about the hardships- the clothes were not as good as the ones they had in 2011/2012 and the Drop-in Centre had no electricity, hence very few of the children came in for meals. With the assistance of one of the Outreach Workers and one of the street children I visited five sites (bases around the city) on my first day and recorded three interviews with street children. Some of the sites were visited at night when street children got together to sleep. The strategy of going out onto the streets to engage with street children was productive in that access was on their terms in their 'own environment', free from organizational regulations. I discovered that they were more accessible than I thought and made plans to see them at their places more often.

The research activities included spending a lot of time interacting with street children at the Drop-In Centre, at their respective bases and at street corners with individuals or a group of street children; recording interviews, street visits, and observations around the city and night visits. I also visited three children's homes, Emthunzini Wethemba, Thuthuka Training Centre in Trenance as well as John Smale Home. Emthunzini Wethemba is a non-governmental sponsored children's home and John Smale Home is run by the Department of Social Welfare as a home for children in need and those in care. The three children's homes accommodate children (including street children) referred by Social Services with Thuthuka Training Centre taking children straight from the streets via the Drop-in Centre. Some street children accompanied me on night visits as well as during the day. A strong working relationship was developed with street children around the city throughout the

fieldwork. The exit strategy was planned well in advance and the participants were aware of my leaving date for both phases of field work.

Gaining access was a continuous process as street children's lives are fluid. There is always a need to ensure that the trust gained at different times is maintained and that ensures gaining further insights into their lives. More knowledge about life on the streets was gained in the second field work phase due to the more direct approach taken to engage with street children at their places other than at the Contact Centre.

5.6 Participant Observation

There is a difference in meaning between the two words (participant and observation) yet when brought to operate together they form a concise and deliberate action by someone in charge of the act of observing. The Oxford Dictionaries: Language Matters defines a participant as '*a person who takes part in something*' and observation as '*The action or process of closely observing or monitoring something or someone*'. For the first, one takes part and at the same time records or documents the activity or what is being observed whereas the second one the task is to simply observe and document the activity or behaviour being observed as an '*outsider*'. Speaking to an undergraduate class as a guest lecturer at UC Irvine, John Whiting, said, '*An observer is under the bed. A participant observer is in it*' (Mack *et al.*, 2005:78). These words mark the difference between observing and participating observer. I was acutely aware of the fact that the observer may affect the situation being observed and thus made the street children accustomed to my presence so that they could, to some extent, carry on as if I was not there. This approach was influenced by Robson (2002:310) who sees '*the advantage of observation as its effectiveness*'. Robson goes on to postulate that '*You do not ask people about their views, feelings or attitudes; you watch what they do and listen to what they say*'.

5.7 How participant observations worked in this study

Participant observation was an important component of the study in that street children could be observed in their '*natural environment*' on the streets and other locations of relevance to them in order to learn what it is like to be a street child while remaining an 'outsider'. In this case being an 'outsider' means not being part of the group and furthermore coming from a different country (United Kingdom). However, I also carried the '*insider*' element from being a former resident of Bulawayo, born and bred in Zimbabwe which meant familiarity with traditions and cultural practices of the wider Zimbabwe society. The observations covered the large group of street children and thus became helpful in the demographics as well as determining the number of children living on the street during the two phases.

Observations started on the first day of fieldwork at Thuthuka Street Children Project which was the operational base for strategic reasons in that the bulk of street children visited the centre on a daily basis. Simply sitting among the children, observing and interacting with them at the Drop-in-Centre (initially) was instrumental in building rapport and more engagement with a large group of street children during the fieldwork period (both first and second phase). Rubin and Rubin (1995) place emphasis on that one needs to be a good conversationalist as well as a good listener. By the end of the first week I was able to put names to faces of the majority of the boys who visited the centre on a daily basis. I quickly established that the boys liked playing football and purchased one during the first week. Playing football accelerated my immersion in that I got to know more than 14 boys by first names through playing football with them. It was through participant observations that a 'connection' with the participants was formed and maintained throughout the period of fieldwork. By connection I mean that rapport was built and there was an 'acceptance' of my presence as a researcher amongst the participants who had a clear picture of that relationship.

Observations made during the second phase were independent from staff at the centre. Most of the research activity took place on the streets and street children were confident to engage me with me as there was quite a large number whom I knew from the first phase in 2011/2012. This was based on the principle of being open enough to participants who were involved in the interactions and observations in such a way that the researcher's presence does not compromise their privacy. In as far as one would like to stretch participant observation to the 'inner goings on' within the group of participants there were limitations as to what would be discussed openly during the 'outsider or insider's presence'. There were sensitive issues like sexual abuse on the streets which was disclosed indirectly during conversations but not directly by those alleged to have been victims.

The most important aspect was finding out what street children do in their daily lives as well as engaging in an activity of interest (if appropriate). For example, information was shared during conversations at the Thuthuka Street Children Centre which was crucial in making further observations at places like the Waverley Bar where most of the girls living on the streets could be seen at night. There is always the importance of determining the best times to visit the place as well as obtaining valuable information about dangerous places (to avoid at night and even during the day). By nature of the group under study (the fluidity in their movements), participant observation was thus less structured and unscheduled when moving about on the streets. It was a daily routine to hang around a group of street children at the centre before making field visits. This provided an insight into what was going on in the streets and visiting the streets illuminated the observations.

In order to capture the fluidity that surrounds street children's lives it was better at times to be a passive observer and at times to be an active/interested observer. There is a presumption that multiple perspectives exist in any given group of individuals or a community and that what we may be told may contradict their behaviour and that this can be verified and checked by way of observing the participants in their own environment.

Mack *et al* (2005:13) argue that ‘*What people say they believe and say that they do are often contradicted by their behaviour*’ and suggest that ‘*observation can be a powerful check against what people report about themselves during interviews and focus groups*’. This would possibly apply to participants who by circumstances are products of a social construct and also engage in constructing and reconstructing their social world.

The value of participant observation in this study was that it became possible to check what participants said, believed and what they did. Often there is a discrepancy or contradiction in what people may say and their behaviour. A case in point is the phrase used by street children such as ‘*let’s go to church*’ which actually meant going to have a joint in an alley. It was through making a follow –up and checking with some participants that this was revealed.

5.8 Interviews

A total of 20 semi-structured interviews were carried out with participants (18 boys and two girls) who volunteered to talk about their experiences. The first set of interviews (eleven) were recorded two weeks into the field work at a time when street children were familiar with me as a researcher and could come to talk to me at any time. I made a conscious decision not to rush the interviews but instead establish and maintain a relationship with the larger group of street children. The second sets of interviews (nine) were recorded during the second phase of fieldwork.

The interviews were crucial for the study in that they helped to get finer personal details and also enabled cross checking of information obtained through formal and informal conversations. The active listening enabled me to revisit some areas and further questions were developed and supplemented with direct observation of various activities at various times, places and contexts. One of the strategies adopted was from Spradley (1979:58-59) who makes an explicit suggestion for conducting ethnographic interviews:

‘It is best to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants’. However, I was cautious not to introduce the new elements too quickly as the interviews could be like a formal interrogation which could lead to rapport disappearing and participants discontinuing their cooperation (Spradley, 1979). In essence the conversations were also shaped from issues arising in the field and from the unfolding of specific experiences relating to the research questions.

An interview schedule was used as guide (see Appendix Three) .The interviews were conducted in such a way that demographic information was collected at beginning and this flowed from the initial contact and the ‘contract’ entered into for the interview to be recorded. This brought about a systematic way of conducting the interviews. The first part of the interview covered demographic information such as age, family background, educational background, time spent living on the streets before moving to actual day-to-day experiences. Finally, the interviews captured street children’s future aspirations. From such a generative narrative I was able to gain background information and a bigger picture of how street children see themselves (their identity) as well as what they think about their future

As stated in the section on sampling, participants were selected on the basis of what they would probably contribute to the research. Hence two of the interviewees (one female and one male) were older former street children whose experiences were considered valuable as they provided a deeper insight into lives of street children post the legal age of majority (18 years). The female participant still lived on the streets while the male had returned home.

Five of the interviews were recorded at the bases and the rest were recorded at Thuthuka Children’s Centre premises. The interviews varied in length depending on the

circumstances under which they were recorded. The interviews were carried out in either Ndebele or Shona with only two of the interviews conducted in English. The language used for each interview was the participant's choice. There were some disruptions during interviews especially those carried outside Thuthuka Street Children Project such as the arrival of other street children during the interview and they wanted to listen. I would pause and continue if the participant was still willing to talk about their experiences. This was the experience when interviewing Mabree and Hona Mwana Wako. Interestingly, the boys did not stay longer and the interviews continued after they had moved on.

The interview process generated ideas which then contributed to the refining of research questions as the fieldwork progressed. The interview technique greatly improved during the second phase building on from the previous experience and the knowledge of how to order the questions and adjust when necessary to do so. This helped in getting the participants to tell their story with minimum interruption in their preferred street environment.

5.9 Reflections on interviews

The interviews were provided an opportunity to explore the street children's experiences beyond observations and field visits. Where recording was not possible, formal and informal conversations were used. This was important when street did not want their activities to be disrupted such as on one occasion when one of the boys asked to be given space to maximise his chances of getting money or food outside a food outlet. This aspect of street children's lives is underlined by the fluidity and the dynamics which may change during the course of interview such as lack of concentration or distractions in the street environment. For example, an interview with Bushu was interrupted by another child asking if one of them was alright.

Interviewing street children can be difficult in that they are constantly on the ‘go’ and they have pressing needs and look for opportunities that may come their way. They usually seek to position themselves for openings to get money for food and, therefore, they can be difficult to pin down for an interview. Lengthy interviews may deprive them of significant opportunities. For example, if something catches their attention while in the middle of doing something street children will straight away switch their attention to the attraction. One example was when I was walking across town with a group of about ten boys to play football when suddenly they saw a familiar figure among street boys driving past and all but one ‘chased’ his car down the streets. One of the boys said ‘there is *Blazi weToyota*’ (a Shona phrase literally translated would be ‘The brother who drives a Toyota’) and they were all gone chasing his car down the streets. This individual’s popularity raised my curiosity about his association with street children which I sought to establish during the fieldwork with little success. Therefore, I had to ensure that I maximised every opportunity for an interview to gather as much information as possible from each participant.

5.10 Field visits

A reflective diary was constructed from field notes and observations made during the fieldwork. I made short notes in a notebook/diary of each day’s events and made summaries capturing key events or observations. The importance of a research diary is well documented in qualitative research from renowned researchers like Malinowski, Bourdieu and contemporaries like Browne. For example, Browne (2013:421) views fieldwork diaries playing an important role ‘*more a logging device....written reflections on personal views about the research process...a repository of critical reflection at a time of much personal uncertainty*’. I used my fieldwork diaries to record my personal reflections, my fears and challenges both personal and ethical during the fieldwork with street children in Bulawayo. During the first fieldwork phase initial visits onto the streets were done with staff from Thuthuka Street Children’s Project. This was helpful in getting used to the ‘terrain’ as the

staff new the places where to find street children. During the initial visits I studied staff interactions with the street children and learnt that they adopted a concerned approach which made the children comfortable to talk to them even if they were meeting them for the first time. Visiting street children at their bases sometime requires their cooperation particularly if they are not familiar with the individual. In total the first fieldwork diary generated over 18 000 words and the second fieldwork diary generated over 19000 words. Photographs of places and street children at various places were taken during the fieldwork to help tell the story of street children's lives. Photographs serve as a reminder of places, individuals and moments captured during fieldwork. They tend to trigger a recollection of memories about particular events. A story of how I understood things, events and routines in this unusual environment emerged and how the situation progressed to familiarity rather than strangeness. Blommaert (2006:58) states that '*fieldwork materials reflect the reality as seen, experienced and understood by you in the process of learning*'.

5.11 Drawings and written work

In social work practice children have been found able to express their wishes and feelings through drawings and narratives of their life situations in a child-centred and child friendly manner. My Space (see Appendix Five, p.278 of this thesis) is one tool that I used to solicit views and feelings of children and young people through written texts and drawings. I envisaged, in my planning, that the street children's literacy would not pose problems as most of the children found on the streets of Bulawayo in a UNICEF study (UNICEF, 2001) were literate. This provided scope for using My Space in order to gain an insight into their thoughts about themselves and life on the streets. These were expressed in written form or drawings with some written explanations. Dennis Jr *et al* (2008) argue that drawings, mental maps, photographs and narratives are an integrative aspect of participatory research and increase the capacity to pull together dimensions of people's lived experiences and place. People can indicate where the experiences occurred (via maps) and what

experiences looked like (via photos and drawings) and how these experiences unfolded (via narratives).

5.12 Photographs

The use of photographs in this research helped to capture street children's places and children moving through time and space. Photographs have, over many years, been used in anthropological studies and a wide variety of disciplines. Hurworth (2003) cite examples where researchers used photographs to aid interviews and elicit more information from participants. Photographs have advantages compared to writing and drawing in that they unlike other methods are less, likely to produce feelings of self-consciousness (Gabhainn and Sixsmith, 2006).

Photographs have been used in research with street children by Hecht (1998) in Northeast Brazil where the participants were involved in carrying out interview. Young and Barrett (2001) used photographs, mapping and drawings in their research on street children in Uganda. Hurworth cites a similar research technique used by Harrington and Lindy (Hurworth, 2003) where photos taken by participants were used and this was followed by a reflective interview to discover reactions and explore the meanings. The use of photographs and drawings encourages dialogue with participants talking about their significance and meanings.

In this study photographs aided the interpretation and analysis of data collected during fieldwork. Photographs captured street children at their places, including places of abode and illuminated their experiences. Although photographic methods have some limitations such as ethical, privacy and sampling and validity shortcomings, they can stimulate participants' memories and explanations and assist to avoid misrepresentation by the researcher. There is an added advantage that they can be used at any stage of the research as well as assist in rapport and trust building. The availability of a camera and smart phone

during the fieldwork drew participants close to the researcher, sometimes by just playing with the phone and taking pictures of themselves. Photographs taken during the first phase painted a different picture of street children to how they were during the second phase. Photographs taken in 2011/2012 showed street children who were at most reasonably dressed compared to the second phase. This was evidence of a slight deterioration in their living conditions which the street children confirmed in the words of one of them who said he was engaging in theft which he did not think of in 2011.

5.13 Reflections on data collection

It is important to mention the conditions on the ground in terms of how they affected data collection one way or the other. As stated in Chapter Two, Zimbabwe is a country in turmoil on many fronts. The research was carried out at a time when conditions on the ground were precarious as demonstrated in Chapter Two. There was a need to tread carefully and plan research activities deliberately avoiding potential disruption due to the heightened political environment. It is worth noting that one was entering uncharted territory in as far as research with street children is concerned. However, armed with literature from around the world on street children and a clear methodology I entered the research site with optimism, an open mind and preparedness to make amendments on the ground if necessary.

The first field visit was done in December 2011 to early January 2012. At the time there was hope that better things were to come under a Government of National Unity formed in February 2009 following protracted negotiation amongst protagonists divided along the nationalist (ZANU-PF) and pragmatist lines (MDC formations), the latter often labelled by the liberation veterans (the nationalists) as puppets of the West. The country emerged from the worst ever year (2008) in the history of the country where hyperinflation surged (Zimbabwe's official inflation rate) to 231,000,000%. In 2011 the country had adopted

multi-currencies, the US Dollar and the South Africa Rand and things were much better. However, that glimpse of hope seemed to have evaporated during the second fieldwork phase (August/September 2013) following a ZANU-PF landslide victory in the harmonized presidential, parliamentary and local government elections in July 2013.

Figure 9: An example of the scale of economic crisis in 2008



A Z\$100bn note - they were worth less than 8p when they were scrapped in August 2008.

Photograph: Philemon Bulawayo/Reuters

Source: theguardian.com, Thursday 9 October 2008.

Timing was of the essence in carrying out fieldwork as there is often a tendency by the police and security forces to clear the streets when there is a major event taking place in the city such as the International Trade Fair which is an event hosted by the City of Bulawayo every year in April. Other occasions to avoid are political rallies which tend to attract violence in the city. Major Bank Holidays like Christmas and Good Friday can also be problematic as many residents head for their rural homes.

The second fieldwork visit was timed to start after the Presidential, Parliamentary and Council elections which took place on the 31st July 2013. The elections had been talked about throughout the 'life' of the Government of National Unity (February 2009 to June 2013). It is common for elections in Zimbabwe to be characterised by violence both in the run-up to and after the elections. Kriger (2005) gives a blow-by-blow of elections from 1980 to 2000 which were characterised by violence and intimidation of opponents by elements of the liberation war party (ZANU-PF), the youth, war veterans and the women's league on one hand (accusing opponents of subversive violence) and the opposition on the other crying foul that they were on the receiving end. Towards the run-up to the July 2103 elections there were pronouncements by some senior members of the military who threatened a military takeover if the opposition won the elections.

My anxiety about post-election violence was not helped after President Mugabe unleashed veiled threats a few days after his inauguration to residents of the two major cities for voting for the opposition. He is reported to have said, *'People from Harare and Bulawayo, to vote for the MDC-T, what you admire in that party? Now, go and get from the MDC-T what you were promised during the elections'*, Mugabe said, describing MDC-T leaders as 'ignoramuses' (<http://www.zimeye.org/?p=88550>; Bulawayo24News, 25 August 2013).

The above statements suggest that Zimbabwe is not an easy environment to carry out research hence one had to be careful about when to access the field and devise safe mechanisms to engage with participants. In the contexts of the study this meant that the study was conducted under a precariousness political situation impacting upon data gathering. The fieldwork was carried with the political situation in mind, not to attract unnecessary attention and scrutiny. My identity as a researcher was known to the participants and it is more likely that I was seen by outsiders as part of Thuthuka Street Children Project. My safety and well-being was of paramount importance in my charting every day movements. I had the advantage of easy immersion in the Bulawayo community

based on my knowledge of the city, knowledge and fluency of the local language and therefore I could pass as an ordinary resident.

5.14 Reflexivity and participation

Reflexivity is an important factor in the conduct of ethnographic research as it is concerned with the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process. Coffey (2002:313) writes:

'The relationship between researcher and researched has always been the subject of debate and scrutiny in qualitative research'. In essence this is a *'process of self-examination'* and reflection (May 1998). It is an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining outside of one's subject matter while carrying out the research. It is imperative that my role of social work practitioner needs to be considered in the research process. The researcher role took precedence over the social work practitioner role, that is, I positioned myself as a researcher first and foremost. My social work practitioner experience was 'tucked away' and never featured in the day to day research activities. As stated earlier on the section on informed consent, if child protection related issues arose, they were to be referred to appropriate authorities at Thuthuka Street Children Project without compromising the participant(s) situations. I also sought advice and guidance from professionals already working with street children in Bulawayo on children protection procedures appropriate at the local level such as referring to Social Services matters of concern that required statutory intervention services. This role would have been undertaken by the Field Officer who had the responsibility for street children. The Matebeleland AIDS Network (who had offices on the premises) offered street children sexual health advice including condoms if they asked for them.

Participant observation means that the researcher is immersed in the setting and that presence influences the direction of information gathering and the quality of information

gathered could be dependent on how the researcher is perceived by participants.

Participation as seen by Hecht (1998) implies being part of the events one is studying while observation implies detachment or even invisibility. It may not be possible to be a 'true' participant in the sense of being part of what street children do, say and where they go particularly where they retire to after the end of each day as these spaces and places may be exclusive and difficult to access for the researcher at different times. Immersion was achieved by participating in day-to-day activities of street children in order to gain an insight into their life experiences.

Employing an ethnographic approach had an advantage of making the process enjoyable to the participants and reflective of their own circumstances. The process could be life changing for the participants in that their understanding of themselves may be enhanced and certainly the researcher's perception of street children changed. Looking back, I was accepted by street children as a friendly adult they could talk to and spend time around. The experience was valuable in that I spent time with street children in places where ordinary members of the public would not venture into. I accessed street children's places which many residents of the city may not know exist such as the 'Home in the Ground', a manhole near Bulawayo Train Station (Figure 18 of this thesis).

The relationship with participants was based on mutual understanding that I was not trying to influence any change to their circumstances. The engagement was purposeful in that the intention was to learn by observing and interacting with street children throughout the fieldwork. The relationship with participants had to be brought to a 'smooth' conclusion for both phases by making the participants aware that I would be leaving in a week's time and that I may come again in the future if I needed more information for the study. The first phase ended with a meal in the evening at the Contact Centre with 28 boys in attendance. Similarly, I said my good-byes during the last two days of the second phase.

One of the boys (Windi) remarked that '*This place will be boring once you are gone*' and he insisted that I pass through the Contact Centre on my way to the airport.

Overall, the fieldwork experience was insightful and a worthwhile experience. There are things that I would do differently such as devising strategies to engage with girls who most of the time remain in the background during the day and operate late at night. I would use a lot of drawings and photographs to capture those experiences of street children that cannot be accessed through observation or interviews. The narratives from 'My Space' were interesting and provided a deep and rich thinking about their situation on the streets.

5.15 Data analysis

For the purposes of this research I decided to use a thematic approach to my data analysis. This decision was based on the assertion that thematic analysis '*offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data*' (Braun and Clarke, 2006:77). Furthermore, this view is supported by contemporary writers like Atkinson and Hammersley's (1998) concept that analysis of data involves an explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions based on descriptions and explanations embedded in the data collected. Tesch (1990) sees thematic analysis as an interpretive process in which data are systematically searched for patterns to provide an illuminating description of the phenomenon under study. Thematic analysis, thus, provided rich insights into a complex phenomenon like life experiences of street children. In essence, that was a way for seeing, and making sense of related material, systematic observation of situations, cultures and behaviours (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Data analysis evolved throughout the course of the study as I constantly reviewed the data collected and documented some flashes of insight that I had (when listening to street children) in my field diaries and notes. This was also done in conjunction with reference to methodological literature with a view to develop analytic strategies. The process of

analysing data collected during two field visits involved moving back and forward between the entire data sets (interview transcripts and field diaries). In the process of fieldwork, not only did I collect data but also created accounts of the social lives of street children and embarked on creating or constructing versions of their social worlds. The analysis was divided into two parts with the first part focusing on demographic information and background of participants (street children) as detailed in Chapter Six while the second phase focused on life experiences as described by street children. For this purpose I devised a list of street children whom I interacted with at Thuthuka Street Children Contact Centre and those that I met on the streets especially at their places of abode (bases) capturing their ages, place of origin, family background, educational background and reasons for leaving home.

The categories generated from the demographic data were coded using numerical figures. For example, I used code 1 for those whose place of origin was in Matebeleland North and code 3 for children whose place of origin was Bulawayo. Numerical codes, up to 10, were allocated for all the provinces. Using the numerical codes I then worked out (manually) the numbers for each of the categories on the list with aggregate scores on a sheet of paper for express recording on a table for each category. The categories were created from the questions emanating from the interview schedule which I used as a guide for information required for the research (see Table 5).

The demographic data captured the significant characteristics of participants (see Chapter Six of this thesis). The demographic information provided opportunities to further explore the participants' experiences in detail as there was a better understanding of who they are, where they came from and where they have been and further extend the inquiry to their future aspirations.

The data on their lived experiences was captured in recorded semi-structured interviews; observations made at various locations; formal and informal conversations with street children as well as field visits. Interviews produced over 40 000 words while observations, formal and informal conversations and field visits were captured in two field work diaries which produced 37 000 words. Pictures of participants were taken at various places and these were useful in capturing the locations and the street children's presentations.

A painstaking exercise of listening to recorded interviews was undertaken to ensure that all important data was captured during transcription. Through this process an in-depth understanding of the interview data and the meanings from their day-to-day communications amongst themselves and their immediate environment was attained. Listening to the recordings brought back the flashes of insight made during fieldwork. It was also possible to reflect on what really happened on the day of the recording. It was like listening to the interviewee with fresh ears. Coloured marking pens were used to highlight what was identified as important texts within each interview in capturing the experiences described by each participant. The texts were linked to questions asked during the interview and the detailed descriptions were then isolated and assigned codes in phrases like 'the first day on the streets.' Themes were created from the key elements of the interviews and the street children's words were used to describe their experiences.

5.16 Anonymity

Anonymity and confidentiality are related but distinct concepts which are given prominence in research with humans. The two concepts complement each other in the manner that data from participants is obtained and handled. Wiles *et al* (2006) argue that anonymity is a way of operationalizing confidentiality. Confidentiality is based on the principle of privacy (in this case information is given in confidence for the purpose of the research project on the basis that it will be treated as such) while anonymity relates to

removing all identifiable information. Anonymisation in this study was ensured by assigning pseudonyms to all participants and no identifiable information was used but also being conscious of the British Sociological Association (BSA) guidelines which caution against changing the characteristics of individuals when presenting data (BSA, 2004). The creation of codes was another way of protecting participants' identities in that individual identities were condensed into one code or more codes to aid data analysis. The process of anonymisation of data ensured that others could not infer identities from the data and the process did not damage the data (SRA, 2003). The names assigned to participants were a random creation and did not originate from the participants. For example, *Njiva* (a term used for people from Matabeleland who work in South Africa) was used for one of the boys who had been to South Africa. It would not be easy to identify or link him to the name because there were many others who have been to South Africa.

There are other factors with regards to publication of certain aspects of the research in the future which would require exclusion of sensitive or dramatic situations which may lead to victimization of street children. Becker (1964) argues that a balance needs to be struck between the potential harm to participants and the benefits of making knowledge public. For example, data involving sensitive disclosures such as police brutality may lead to victimization of street children as a group. In this study, participants' stories were individual specific and changing key information would not be sufficient. For example, Hona Mwana Wako's circumstances were such that it was important to put them into the public domain as they characterised the plight of the girls on the streets of Bulawayo. This also applied to pictures used in the study to illustrate or explain different scenarios. All the pictures were pixelated to conceal the full identity of participants. This covered mainly their faces and in some cases where participants could be identified through their clothing. This approach is used quite a lot in the print media.

5.17 Concluding remarks

Handling ethnographic data requires a high level of sensitivity where identifiable information is removed /anonymized to protect the identity of the participants. The principle of anonymity was applied to all data that could identify participants. All data presented in the findings relating to individual participants does not contain the participant's original identity and the coding of data further enhanced anonymity. The data in the study retained a high degree of confidentiality and anonymity. Participants in the study were vulnerable street children (in a powerless position) and protecting their identities takes precedence as the research would be for public consumption.

Chapter Six: Demographics of participants

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a snapshot of the demographics of participants in the study.

Demographic data was generated from observations, informal and formal conversations with participants at Thuthuka Street Children Project and from the 20 interviews throughout the fieldwork period (one and two). Basic information about participants obtained from conversations was used to inform the study of the characteristics and background of the participants. The data provides an insight into the background of the street children in this study as well as the reasons why they left home for the streets.

6.2 Observations at Thuthuka Street Children Project (Fieldwork One)

Table 2. Below is snapshot of numbers observed at Thuthuka Contact Centre

Date	No of boys	No of girls	Total
12/12/2011	23	1	23
14/12/2011	27	0	27
15/12/2011	18	0	18
21/12/2011	15	0	15
23/12/2011	15	0	15
27/12/2011	10	0	10
2/01/2012	20	0	20

5/01/2012	20	0	20
6/01/2012	24	0	24

Source: Fieldwork diary 10 December 2011-6 January 2012

The numbers were recorded during lunch time when the majority of the children were at the Contact Centre. The Contact Centre is open from 8.00 am to 5.00 pm from Monday to Friday and closed during the weekend and bank holidays. The attendance at the Contact Centre is on a voluntary basis and, therefore, some children, for one reason or another, choose not to come to the centre on particular days. The numbers fluctuated between 10 and 28 between 10 December 2011 and 6 January 2012. There was one female and the rest were boys. The children go to the centre to wash their clothes, bath, for tea and lunch and then go back to the streets where they do all sorts of things to survive. Thuthuka Contact Centre caters for street children aged 18 and below. However, some of those above 18 were sometimes allowed access to ablutions facilities.

There was a decline in numbers from 15 December 2011, down to the lowest number of 10 recorded at Thuthuka Contact Centre soon after Christmas 2011. One of the reasons for the low numbers was due to some of the children leaving the city for their homes for Christmas or moving to other towns and cities during the festive season. Table 2 (above) shows that the numbers coming to Thuthuka Contact Centre started to pick up in the New Year when some of the street children returned. I observed that some of the familiar faces disappeared with only 15 boys turning up at Thuthuka Contact Centre on the 23 December 2011. Many street children were reported by their colleagues to have gone home or to other cities like Gweru or Harare. This was not surprising as it is common practice for many people living in towns and cities to visit their rural homes (in Zimbabwe) during this

period. Hill (2003:91) notes that '*going home is a regular pilgrimage for city folk*'. Those who do not have rural homes are labelled as 'born location', meaning born in the townships and suggests that they lack cultural roots.

The New Year welcomes returnees of city dwellers particularly workers coming back to their daily jobs in the city. It also welcomes new arrivals joining the street child population. I witnessed two new arrivals who claimed to have been directed to Thuthuka Contact Centre by homeless people in the city. I observed how they became integrated into the already established group of street children. This appeared to be a gradual process starting at the centre and continuing on to the streets later in the evening.

Thuthuka Contact Centre operates an open door policy to street children and thus becomes a focal point for many street children in the city. Information obtained from Thuthuka Street Children Project suggests that the fluidity in movement continues throughout the year with more street children either joining the ranks of the homeless or leaving the city for various reasons. This is one reason why street children numbers are subject to change at different times of the year.

During the second field visit I adopted a different approach to ascertain numbers of children living on the streets. It was not easy to monitor the numbers as very few of the children visited Thuthuka Contact Centre on a daily basis as there was no electricity at the centre and, therefore, there was no food provided most of the time. Street children told me that they would rather stay in the city centre to beg or look for ways of getting money or food. The children sleep at specific places of abode located around the city which they referred to as bases which were central to accounting for the numbers based on who slept where. Street children tend to sleep in groups formed around friendships, also based on common language or place of origin. Information about the number of children living on the streets during this period was obtained directly from street children through recorded

interviews and conversations (formal and informal throughout the second field visit) with street children. There were between 50 and 70 children living on the streets during the second phase (see Table 3). The majority of them were boys with only eight girls visible in my experience.

6.3 Distribution based on location and gender

Table 3. Distribution of street children in August/September 2013 based on locations around the city

Location/Base	No of Boys	No of Girls	Total
Egodini	20	0	20
Bulawayo Centre	10	0	10
EMkotweni (Alley in Town)	15	2	17
Bradfield Shopping Centre	10	0	10
Centenary Park	Unknown	5	5
Golf Course	0	1	1
Other (house or other sheltered accommodation)	3	0	3

Total	58	8	66
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Source: Fieldwork diary August /September 2013 based on information provided by street children.

A detailed description of the places of abode will follow in the section on their places on the streets. The above table shows that there were more street children during the second field work phase than in the first phase. The majority of street children were boys in their early teens while four of the girls living on the streets of Bulawayo were in their teens. My observations on numbers were close to numbers reported by the Chairman of the Bulawayo Task Force on Street Children, Mr. Jackson Nyoni who was quoted in a local newspaper in Bulawayo saying ‘*Street children below the age of 18 increased from 45 in 2012 to 56 this year with ten females and 46 males*’ (Chronicle, 27 December 2013). This was an 11 per cent increase in the number of street children.

For explicit presentation of demographic data a list of categories was generated and data grouped into columns based on names (anonymized) , age, place of origin, status of parents, who they had been living with before coming to live on the streets, the number of years they have been on the streets, education level achieved and reasons for leaving home. The demographic data was collated and recorded in relevant columns during the first and second field visits. The information amassed became more valuable as this helped me to know most of the children by their first names. The African tradition of starting a conversation by asking for one’s name and place of origin opened up avenues to get the finer details about the street children that I interacted with. I managed to get detailed information covering the specific areas mentioned above to produce a table where individual details were captured and total numbers worked out per category.

6.4 Number of participants in this study

The number of children who provided demographic information used in this study was 42 and they included six former street children who volunteered to talk about their experiences. The list had a total of six females and 36 males (see table 4 below). Street based children maintain ties with former street children who I will refer to as street youths. They live together and intermingle in the streets during the day and congregate at various locations at night time. There is some interdependence which includes some form of protection as well as exploitation of the younger children by older children and street youth.

Four of the children only provided information about their names, age and place of origin. The information was obtained through brief conversations that took place in public places or via informal conversations amongst street children with no opportunity to probe further. For example, one may tease the other about his place of origin and that would yield information about their places of origin or it could be a nickname like Binga which would suggest that the individual originates from Binga District in Matabeleland North. Binga is home to the Tonga tribe who lived on the Zambezi River escarpment for centuries only to be moved to higher ground in the late 1950s when the giant Lake Kariba was built to generate electricity for the federation of Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Nyasaland (Malawi) established from 1953 and ended on December. 31, 1963 (HC Deb 17 December 1963).

6.5 Distribution by age and gender

Table 4. Distribution by age and gender

Age	No of boys	No of girls	Total
11-13	4	0	4
14-15	2	0	2
16	5	1	6
17	6	1	7
18	13	2	15
19+	6	2	8
Total	36	6	42

Source: List from field visits 1 and 2

The majority of the children on the list were boys (30) aged between the age of 11 -18 years and four of the girls were aged between 16 and 18 years. The youngest child was a boy aged 11 and the youngest girl was aged 16 years. This suggests that boys probably come to the streets at a much younger age than girls. In total fifteen of the children (boys and girls) were aged 18. The eight former street children were aged between 19 and 23 years. This finding suggests that girls on the streets were much older (in their late teens) than most of their male counterparts. While the age of majority starts at 18 years, street children do not see themselves as having ceased to be children of the streets after their

eighteenth birthday nor do they stop seeing themselves as children. Reaching that age milestone does not necessarily mean they will leave the streets. Instead some of them adapt to other ways of survival such as doing piece jobs around the city and joining the multitudes of the homeless adults in the city living alongside the street children community.

6.6 Place of origin

The issue of where street children originate from is very important for the research in that it enables one to analyse movements between social, physical and moral boundaries. It also helps to understand trends in as far as how they come to share some form of identity and a sense of belonging to smaller groups and their relationship within a group of children living on the streets and the larger group of homeless people in the city. The place of origin is directly linked to language and culture and the broader concept of identity.

Table 5. The number of children presented by place of origin

Province of origin	Number of boys	Number of girls	Total
Matabeleland North	3	0	3
Matabeleland South	2	1	3
Midlands	12	1	13
Masvingo	3	1	4
Manicaland	5	0	5

Bulawayo	7	2	9
Mashonaland West	1	1	2
Mashonaland East	0	0	0
Mashonaland Central	0	0	0
Harare	3	0	3
Total	36	6	42

Source: List of children seen during phase I and 2

The Midlands province had the largest number of 12 boys and one girl (30.95%) than any other province. Only nine of the children declared their place of origin as Bulawayo.

Overall, 64.25% of the children on the list originated outside Bulawayo and the vast region of Matabeleland. All the children were of black origin and the majority of them spoke Shona which is an indicator that they do not originate from the region of Matabeleland and may not have a strong connection to the city. It is important to note that Ndebele and Shona are, in essence, broad classifications (there are other cultures and languages other than the two) based on language and culture and by and large denote a regional belonging. Put simply, Ndebele people are deemed to originate from Matabeleland and Shona people from Mashonaland. These classifications tend to dominate social and political debates in Zimbabwe as evidenced in Chapter Two.

While the dominant language in Bulawayo is Ndebele, it was the opposite with street children as the language spoken by most of the children was Shona and even those from Matabeleland had conversations with their counterparts in Shona. Other ethnic groups, other than black were not represented. This is not surprising given the history of the country where, for example, the white population and other ethnic groups are considered privileged. This is historical as the colonial administration in Zimbabwe resembled the apartheid system of separate development based on race and thus creating a class of the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Most of the children had a rural connection and often referred to their rural home as their place of origin even if they had a connection in the city. This distinction is inherent in conversations among Zimbabweans as the 'home' in the city is often referred to as 'the house' (*endlini* in Ndebele).

6.7 Status of parents

One important question asked was the status of parents that is whether they were from single parent families, both parents alive or deceased. The issue of the status of parents is linked to the carer givers before the individual street child moved on to live on the streets.

Table 6. Distribution by status of parents

Status of parents	Number of children	Percentage (%)
Both parents alive	5	11.9
One parent deceased	5	11.9
Both parents deceased	28	66.7
No information provided	4	9.5

Total	42	100
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Source: List from fieldwork 1 and 2

The majority of the participants were orphans, 28 out of 42 (66.67%) while 5 out of 42 had both parents alive and the same number had one parent deceased (11.9%). The large number of orphans is consistent with national statistics from the Census 2012 which indicated that 57 per cent of the orphans had their father dead whilst 23 per cent had both parents who were dead (Zimbabwe Census 2012). The Census defined orphans as those children aged 17 years and below whose mothers were dead but fathers were alive or whose fathers were dead but their mothers were alive or both parents were dead. This definition seems to depart from the commonly used definition from the Oxford Dictionary which describes an orphan as ‘a child whose parents are dead’ (The Oxford Popular Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1991). In this study I adopted the concept of an orphan as a child whose parents were dead. There is a strong link between orphanhood and living on the streets as figures from this study suggest.

6.8 Reasons for leaving home

The reasons for leaving home are important for the study in that they provide an insight into problems at ‘*source*’ and how these compare to literature from elsewhere in Africa and around the world.

Table 7. Distribution on reasons for leaving home

Reasons for leaving home	Number of boys	Number of girls	Total
Poverty	2	0	2
Poverty/ Ill-treatment	3	1	4
Orphanhood/poverty	15	2	17
Ill-treatment/Abuse by carer/parent	3	0	3
Behavioural problems/Delinquency	10	0	10
Neglectful parenting	1	0	1
Abandoned	1	0	1
No information provided	1	3	4
Total	36	6	42

Source: List from fieldwork 1 and 2

The majority of the children, 17 out of 42 (40.47%) declared the reason for leaving home as orphanhood and poverty. This outcome relates to the number of children recorded as

orphans on Table 6 and further strengthens that orphanhood and poverty may result in children going on to the streets. Furthermore, this could also relate to care arrangements within the extended family network which has been under strain with many of the children being cared for by grandparents (See Table 8). A total of 10 out of 42 (19.23 %) declared that they left home due to behavioural problems (having done wrong at home). Poverty and ill-treatment also contributed six out of 42 children (14.29%). There was one odd case where the respondent declared that they were abandoned by parents who allegedly went to look for work in South Africa at the height of Zimbabwe's economic and political meltdown around 2004.

6.9 Care arrangements before they moved to live on the streets

Having in mind the existence of the extended family network in Zimbabwe I found it necessary to ask the question as to whom the children lived with before moving to the streets. Germann's study of child-headed households in Bulawayo (Germann, 2005) showed how the extended family support network was under strain in the face of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Table 8. Distribution of who they lived with before coming to live on the streets.

Person lived with	Number of children	Percentage (%)
Grandparents (maternal or paternal)	18	43
Uncle /aunt	9	21
Siblings	3	7
Parent(s)	5	12

One parent/step parent	3	7
No information	4	10
Total	42	100

Source: List Field Visits 1 and 2

The majority of the children lived with grandparents (42.86 %). Those who lived with uncles or aunts came second at 21.43% while those who lived with their parents accounted for only 11.90 %. Another 7.14% lived with one parent or with a step parent. A similar percentage of 7.14% lived with siblings. It is important to note that those who lived with other relatives (including grandparents and siblings) were orphans. There is also evidence of the traditional African support system where orphans are cared for by close relatives which appears to be strong in the rural areas as most of the children living on the streets in Bulawayo declared a rural connection.

The above demographics are reflective of the national picture in relation to orphans. The National AIDS Council Report (2009) revealed that 1.3 million children in Zimbabwe were orphaned by HIV/AIDS, which is one quarter of the child population in Zimbabwe. The statistics also indicate that there were 50 000 households headed by children below the age of 18 whose parents died of AIDS. The First Report of the Senate Thematic Committee on HIV and AIDS and Access to Treatment (2010) revealed that there were 1.5 million HIV positive people in the 15 to 19 age group and further that girls between 15 and 19 years of age were the most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection. The National AIDS Council Report (2009) suggests that these children are likely to suffer psychological and social problems. There is a further suggestion that AIDS has produced a generation of orphans

with far reaching implications for Zimbabwean society. By implication, this can be true for street children who have the potential to become adults who do not fulfil their potential in a society already devastated and weakened by HIV/AIDS.

Official figures show that 159 000 children in Zimbabwe were HIV positive and about half of them were orphans (The Report of the Senate, 2010). The report states that 40 000 children die from HIV/AIDS every year while 2 300 people die every week from HIV related illness. A sizeable number of street children in this study were orphans and these statistics highlight the extent of risk that they may be exposed to risk of HIV/AIDS infection on the streets. This aspect of street children's lives will be revisited in a discussion on gender differences and vulnerability of street children to many forms of harm including sexual abuse of both boys and girls.

6.10 Level of education

The level of education is important in this study as it locates street children in the Zimbabwean context in terms of strides made in education since independence. Zimbabwe has an impressive literacy rate of 91.9 % (National Census, 2012) and those aged 15 and over can read and write English (83.6% of the population). The educational policies adopted by the ZANU (PF) government at independence put education at the forefront, probably second in expenditure after defence. Access to education was made free at primary school level and more schools were opened in rural areas and urban areas. It is important to examine circumstances of children living on the streets who do not access education at all.

Table 9: Distribution by level of education

Educational level reached	Number of Boys	Number of girls	Total
Grade 1-3 (Lower primary school)	5	1	6
Grade 4-7(Upper primary school)	15	0	15
Form 1-2(Lower secondary school)	10	1	11
Form 3-4 (Upper second school)	5	1	6
Advanced level	0	0	0
No information	1	3	4
Total	36	6	42

Source: List Field Visits 1and 2

The majority of the children,15 out of 42 (35.71%) had four years to seven years of primary school education which enabled them to read and write in both English and a vernacular language. All the children were boys. A total of 11 children out of 42 (26.19%) had up to two years secondary education and ten of them were boys. Six of the children left

school within three years of primary school which by any standard meant they would probably write their names but would struggle with written content. This was evident with some of the children when asked to write or draw a picture describing themselves or their lives (on My Space). These were visual AIDS used to tease out their views about their lives as well as their future aspirations. Only five out of 42 children declared they had up to four years of secondary school education. None of the children had reached advanced levels of education. It is important to note that only two of the recorded interviews were conducted in English and the rest were in local languages (Ndebele or Shona). In everyday communication street children use English words and can speak English while conducting their *business* of begging especially from the white population. For some of the street children education featured in their future aspirations which will be discussed later in this study.

6.11 Time spent living on the streets

Table 10. Distribution by length of time spent living on the streets

Time spent living on the streets	Number of children	Percentage (%)
0-6 months	8	19.1
7 months to 1year	4	9.5
2- 3 years	8	19.1
4-5 years	9	21.4
6-7 years	5	11.9

8 years and more	4	9.5
No information provided	4	9.5
Total	42	100

The length of time spent living on the streets varied from a few days to eight years and more. Nine out of 42 (21.43 %) had lived on the streets for four to five years. The next category of two to three years accounted for eight out of 42 (19.05%) with a similar number having only been on the streets for less than six months .A further 11.90 % (5 out of 42) had lived on the streets for six to seven years while those who had lived on the streets for eight years and more accounted for 9.52% (4 out of 42) and the same number had been on the streets for seven months to one year. Overall, 26 out of 42 children (61.90 %) had lived on the streets for more than two years while 12 out of 42 (28.57%) had been on the streets for a few months to a year. Four of those who had spent more than eight years on the streets were street youths (former street children still living with street children below the age of 18).

The majority of the children (35 out 42) declared that they had lived in an urban area before moving to live on the streets in Bulawayo. I established that those who came from Harare made their journey through the cities along the road and rail link to Bulawayo like Kwekwe and Gweru in the Midlands Province before heading for Bulawayo. Children from Matabeleland did not have stopovers in other towns. There is a tendency for those coming from Harare to arrive in Bulawayo in small groups and that makes it easy to establish dominance over others already living on the streets. I observed this trend during the first field visit when four boys including one on a wheel chair arrived at Thuthuka Contact Centre from Gweru for lunch. Often, I learnt from street children that four or five

of the children left Bulawayo either for Gweru or Harare or Beitbridge. Travelling between the cities is easy as they use public transport, particularly buses.

As explained in Chapter Two there are reasons as to why some of the street-based children choose Bulawayo as it is well connected in terms of transport network such as road and rail links. This trend is not surprising in that Census Statistics in 2012 (in relation to general population movements) show that Harare and Bulawayo exhibited the highest in-migration rates of 49 per cent each and an out-migration of 39 per cent each. This suggests that those who move into Bulawayo tend to stay longer. Bulawayo was described by those who came from Harare and the Midlands as quiet and peaceful compared to Harare where there are large numbers of street children and homeless adults resulting in a fierce competition for food and territory. The children described Bulawayo as a place where shoe glue is easily accessible. Glue sniffing is common among street children as they claimed it takes away their worries about life. There was also what appeared to be some kind of adventurism among street children in that a trip further down south to Beitbridge on the border with South Africa ends up with some street children crossing the border into South Africa. I will return to this aspect of movement and crossing borders and how that translates into their life experiences as told by street children.

6.12 Concluding remarks

The demographic information detailed in this chapter shows the difficulties of enumerating numbers of street children due to the fluidity of their movements. Therefore, the demographic data is based on estimates of the numbers of children observed to have been living on the streets of Bulawayo during the fieldwork. The lack of accurate figures on street children is widely accepted (Ennew, 1994).

The reasons for being on the streets are varied and strongly linked to orphanhood, poverty, abuse as well as difficulty relationships with their main carers. The children were aged

between 11 and 18 years of age. There were also a considerable number of former street children who were living with those below the age of 18. The age demarcation (legal age of majority) seemed not to exist or matter for these homeless children and young people. They share the same identity and experiences on the streets and there is some mutual interdependency.

The majority of children living on the streets of Bulawayo originate from outside the city and the vast region of Matabeleland. This brings up issues of migration, language and culture among street children and their interactions amongst themselves and the community at large. They live in groups of four to 20 at their 'bases'. These are places of abode whose membership is based on friendship lines and sometimes language and area of origin. The majority of the children were boys with a few girls seen mostly in the evening which has been the case from studies elsewhere. This issue of gender imbalance will be discussed in some detail in the findings section. It was striking that the majority of the children I saw and spoke to during fieldwork were orphans and lived with relatives (grandparents, uncles and aunties or siblings) before moving to live on the streets. All the children seen and spoken to during fieldwork had some form of formal education with the large majority having been to primary school and a few to secondary school. The majority of the children have lived on the streets for between two and five years. It was striking to note that a small number seen and spoken to during fieldwork have lived on the streets for more than eight years. The demographic information explored in this section suggests that the street children I saw and spoke to during fieldwork are a distinct group that can be identified by their continued stay on the streets and patterns of their movements on the streets of Bulawayo. There are associated with spatial areas in the city which they apportion themselves as places of abode. In other, words the places assume the position of 'home'. The next section focuses on their experiences with the knowledge of their backgrounds.

Chapter Seven: Findings on life experiences

Nobody's child

Just like a flower

They're growing wild

Got no mama's kisses

And no daddy's smile

Nobody wants them

They're nobody's child

Source: Song by Cohen and Mel Foree, Sokwanele Article: December 10th, 2007).

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings based on my analysis of the data obtained directly from participants, interviews, observations, field visits and other relevant data sets. The chapter seeks to capture those experiences presented from the participants' perspective as well as locate the findings within a context of space and time.

7.2 The question of language

In this section language will be discussed in terms of its importance as a medium of communication with participants and meaning making. I would argue that language defines individuals and groups of people in the context of territory. The above view is based on the premise that language is an essential part of people's social identities (Tajfel, 1978; Dieckhoff, 2004; Byram, 2006; Jaspal, 2009). Besides being an instrument of communication it can also be a means of asserting one's distinctiveness from others as well as contribute to forging common ties. One important aspect of language in the context of

this research is its link to participants' origin and the other is what can be called 'street' language- that is, the language used and understood by street children in their interaction amongst themselves.

In the previous section, places of origin were analysed in terms of numbers. These areas have significant language and cultural differences. For example, in Zimbabwe those who speak Shona are associated with Mashonaland and Shona culture and those who speak Ndebele are associated with Matebeleland and Ndebele culture. The Midlands Province has a mixture of Shona and Ndebele. There is also a cluster of Shona dialects such as Ndau (Chipinge and Chimanimani), Manyika (around Mutare) and Karanga (Masvingo), Zezeru (around Harare) and Korekore (Mutoko). The Zimbabwean Constitution recognises a total of 16 official languages and most of these languages are associated with regions. For example, isiKhalanga is spoken in south and western part of Zimbabwe, along the outlying areas bordering Botswana. Sotho speaking people are found in Gwanda while Venda is spoken in Beitbridge (Matebeleland South) close to the border with South Africa. Nambiya is spoken in the Hwange area while Tonga is the language spoken in Binga to the north of Zimbabwe (people who lived on the Zambezi escarpment before the man-made Lake Kariba was built on the Zambezi River in the late 1950s to early 1960s). These small differences in language reveal a great deal about one's identity in Zimbabwe and it was also true for street children in this study.

It is possible through dialects to identify which town or village a person is from through a particular accent/dialect. For example, a person who speaks Khalanga would be from western Zimbabwe and could be associated with a town like Plumtree (close to the border with Botswana) or small villages like Kezi in Matebeleland South. This would be true with someone who speaks Tonga being from Binga in Matebeleland North Province. It is, therefore, possible to identify people through their ethnic group /tribe. Each ethnic group or tribe observes certain customs and norms specific to their group. These could include

how people exchange greetings or how they accord respect to certain individuals in society. I found the cultural dictates relevant to the street children in that these important characteristics remain in place and become part of who they are on the streets.

It was possible, therefore, to capture some aspects of the street children's social world through language. To know and understand a language spoken by the research participants is crucial in any ethnographic research. In addition to that, fluency or lack of it may hinder an individual's participation in local events. I had the distinct advantage of being able to speak Ndebele and Shona, the two major languages spoken in Zimbabwe and particularly in Bulawayo by virtue of having been born and bred in Zimbabwe. I have a good understanding of various cultural and tribal practices across the regions. I established through initial conversations with the street children at Thuthuka Street Children's Project in my first week of fieldwork that Shona was the most common language spoken by the street children which underlined their origins from outside Bulawayo (and the vast Matabeleland region) where Ndebele is the main language. This did not come as a surprise as previous studies (UNICEF 1997) and recent pronouncements by Jackson Nyoni, Chairman of the Bulawayo Task Force on Street Children (Chronicle 28 December 2013) state that the majority of the children living on the streets in Bulawayo originated outside the region.

The dominance of the Shona language among street children in Bulawayo seems to have been in place for a while. For example, two of the interviewees, Thumi and Nduna recounted their experiences as far back as 2008 when the majority of the street children (boys) were Shona speaking and imposed their will on street children regarded as having no power. Language can, therefore, shape the landscape around street children's lives. The ability to communicate in a local language makes life much easier for street children.

Despite the dominance of Shona among street children I engaged with, Bulawayo, as a multi-cultural city as stated in a previous section on the research site, stands out in terms of language diversity. While Ndebele is the dominant language in Bulawayo, the majority of the population understands Shona. Therefore, non-Ndebele speakers do not find it difficult to live in Bulawayo. There is a perception though among the Ndebele that there is Ndebele language annihilation with important communication through radio and television programmes featuring mostly Shona content. This is certainly not the case with other cities further afield such as Harare, Masvingo and Mutare where the majority of the population is Shona speakers. My experience of living in Harare is that speaking the local language (Shona) is taken for granted and one would find it difficult even to ask for directions in Ndebele. Probably the reason for this is that since independence in 1980 speaking Shona has become synonymous with '*national identity*' and often eyebrows could be raised in Harare (the capital city) if one did not utter a word in Shona. Perhaps it is a question of Shona speakers displaying arrogance or a misplaced perception of the dominance of Shona over other languages.

The issue of language impacts on relationships among street children in Bulawayo such as how they view themselves and others. One's language can easily become part of one's identity among a group of street children. For example, one of the boys was nicknamed '*Mshona*' by the mainly Ndebele speaking group. Although he seemed to fit in with this group of boys, they spoke to him in Shona most of the time. Another boy was nicknamed '*Binga*' because he claimed to have come from that area. The other connection with an area was that he smoked marijuana which is associated with *Tonga* traditions. There was another salient dimension to language presented in the words of Hungwe in his interview who said '*I do not talk to Ndebele boys*'. This was expressed in a deep seated tribalism and it was apparent that he did not associate with any Ndebele boys throughout the fieldwork.

Tribal differences tend to separate people and street children are no exception. These differences can become a source of conflict.

Language and cultural differences seemed to be less important in certain contexts such as when street children were in unfamiliar places like South Africa. Hungwe disclosed that street children from Zimbabwe are united by the 'homeboy' mentality (*Mfanekhaya* or *Mwana wekumusha* for Ndebele and Shona speakers respectively) when in South Africa yet language differences set them apart back home. To hear someone speak their mother language helps identify them with their place of origin and opens up a way of starting a discussion which leads to friendships and future relationships.

Language tends to have implications for movements between cities and regions including crossing borders such as going to South Africa where Ndebele speakers tend to find it easy to integrate because of similarities between Ndebele and isiZulu (spoken in many parts of South Africa). However, language would not necessarily stop a street child going into areas where their native language is not spoken. Such was the case with Shona speaking street children crossing the border into South Africa and going far and deep into the heart of Johannesburg.

Language played an important part throughout the fieldwork and I learnt new phrases from the interviews and observations. I had to pay particular attention to certain words used by street children especially when they were unfamiliar such as '*let's go to church*' which upon checking with some boys who did not go with the group what that meant, I discovered that it was a code used when they were going to smoke marihuana. Although I was present when the phrase was uttered I was excluded from the true meaning of the phrase. My curiosity was raised when I saw them going into an alley and there was no church in that direction. The phrase was used as a disguise for an activity that they did not want other people to know about.

Other words of note were '*izibhonda*' (Ndebele word for tramps) and '*Madigira*', Shona slang for those who dig for food from large bins around town while food from bins was called '*Digira*' (Shona slang for food from bins). One crucial phrase was '*Hit dry*' which was used in reference to unprotected sex. This came up in a general conversation with street children and in an interview with Mukoma who said '*Lumez, Mabree apedza bafana muno mustreet, anoda inonzi hit dry for \$2.00*' (Uncle, Mabree has infected the boys on the streets; she insists on unprotected sex called hit dry and charges them \$2.00). The phrase 'hit dry' used to describe unprotected sex may mean anything to the uninitiated.

This above statement was made with a lot of concern for street boys who are at risk of HIV/AIDS and sexual transmitted infections particularly from a former street girl who disclosed in her interview that she was on anti- retroviral treatment. In her interview, Mabree told me that she used to frequent public drinking places in the city like Beverley Hotel and Bar where she would sleep with men for a fee. Listening to words used provided avenues to follow during interviews and observations and during field visits. Using leads gained from listening to conversations among street children and picking on unfamiliar language from street children further clarification was sought in order to put their words into context. Another example was a disclosure made by Mukoma in conversation and in reference to activities by some of the boys. Mukoma said '*Some of these boys go to meet the man who operates a push cart and he sodomises them*' (*Laba batshona besiya kumdala wengqola ebatshaya ibhonyaponya*). This led to a further investigation of street-based relationships and a closer examination of relationship between street children and homeless adults.

The issue of language also featured when transcribing transcripts from Ndebele and Shona into English. This meant that I had to select the exact or similar words as meanings may differ depending on the emphasis placed on certain aspects of the conversation by the participant. This made transcribing a daunting task because at times there were no direct or

equivalent words to English from the local languages. Listening to recordings over and over again enabled me to find the exact or close words to the actual words said in the local languages as well as capture the actual meanings. For example, if someone was to express displeasure about someone in Ndebele or Shona respectively, they would say '*Uyinja yomuntu*' or '*Uri imbwa yemunhu*' which in English means 'you are useless'. For example, Member referred to having sex as '*kurova makumbo*'; literally translation to English would be '*Hitting the legs*'. Another example is the use of the word '*Mhene*' by street children when describing a wealthy young businessman whom they called '*Blazi we Toyota*' (the brother who drives a Toyota in reference to his Twin-Cab). I learnt from the boys that he was 'loaded' and gave them a lot of money towards Christmas in 2011. This was when a lot of the children left town for various destinations including returning to their rural homes and moving to other cities. In the days preceding Christmas I noted that a lot of boys coming to the Contact Centre had new clothes, trainers, mobile phones and other small musical gadgets like iPods.

I was curious about this man's relationship with the boys because he was not known to Thuthuka Street Children Project and the boys were not willing to say anything more other than just referring him as '*Blazi we Toyota*'. *Gonyethi*, who seemed to have struck a close friendship with *Blazi we Toyota*, used to call me *Blazi we Toyota* probably because I asked questions about this man more than any other person at Thuthuka Street Children Project. The man in question helped *Gonyethi* with rent in the townships in 2013 and it was apparent that sensitive details about him were not forthcoming. The man became a subject of interest throughout the fieldwork visits but he remained elusive. I will return to relationships that street children forge amongst themselves and with various individuals later in this chapter.

Street children develop the language of the 'other' that is not in everyday use by the larger society. Paying attention to language and its use was important for exploring their

experiences and the way they understood questions was quite distinct. For example, when asking them about who they lived with before coming on to the streets, one would say ‘Who was at home when you left’ (*Watshiya kulobani ekhaya* for Ndebele or *Wakasiya kunani kumba* in Shona). This line of asking questions was helpful in relation to care arrangements before they arrived on the streets. Besides being a medium of communication, I found language as a strong marker of social identity among street children that I saw and spoke to. Shona speaking street- children have created a language structural dominance in their ‘*unstructured*’ street environment. This is exercised through sheer numbers and in that context those with power are in control of everything.

7.3 The first day on the streets

This theme came from the question posed during interviews. Posing the question, ‘*Can you describe your first experience of life on the streets? For example, your first day on the streets and move on to how life progressed thereafter*’, proved to be the catalyst in gaining an insight into the process of integration into life on the street and a new life without adult supervision. This got them to talk in a captivating manner as they traced their journey to the streets. I asked this question after finding out about their reasons for leaving home. I found it intriguing that most of the children I spoke to left home in their early teens to face life on the streets on their own. While the first day on the streets was described by the majority of street children as very difficult, it was also exciting and liberating after the hardships of home.

For any young child to leave home or rather ‘abandon’ home to face uncertainty and risk is in itself a bold decision on their part. This aspect of decision -making tends to be linked, in most cases, to their circumstances in a family set-up as shown on the demographic section, that is, the standard of care, loss of parents and behavioural problems. As is the case in many countries street children follow a route, a movement towards the street, to borrow

Lucchini's (1994) terminology in describing how street girls end up on the streets. It was interesting to learn about the transition of children into street life, a transition which most of the time, according to Aptekar (1988a) and Felsman (1988), is not a sudden or abrupt breakaway from family life.

This was how Sabhabha described his first day on the streets of Bulawayo:

'It was very difficult. I spent the whole day without eating anything and only ate in the evening when I came to Egodini, where the other boys gave me food....' The first hardship Sabhabha faced was going for the whole day without food. This was compounded by the fact that he arrived from his rural home in Tsholotsho knowing no one in the city and with no money to feed himself. However, he was eventually found by one of the seasoned street children who introduced him to the large group at Egodini base in the evening and where he got food. This marked his unfolding journey into life on the streets. He was offered some space where he slept with the other boys. *'I slept with no blankets'*, Sabhabha said. He was awake all night and spent the night thinking about what to do and recalled that it was very cold that night. The other boys told him how they lived on the streets and the next morning he joined the group on their search for food. A pattern was set where waking up in the morning every day the first task was to look for food.

Nduna's experience of the first day on the streets of Bulawayo is important as he did not come due to poverty or hardship. His was an individual experience driven by what he described as mischief. Nduna entered the streets in 2008 with a lot of money after selling his maternal uncle's petrol stored in containers at home while the uncle and aunt were away from home. By Zimbabwean standards the uncle's family lived in one of the upper class areas of Bulawayo and Nduna felt that his basic needs were met. The extract below is how he described his first day on the streets.

‘The first day I entered the streets I had money. I drank lots of alcohol and saw beautiful girls in town and decided I would go home the next day as this was my first opportunity to be out. I slept outside the Hotbread Shop on my own’.

Like Sabhabha he slept without any blankets, a feature that is common with many street children on arrival on the streets and probably for most of the time they spend on the streets. I noted that during the interview, Nduna presented as re-living the experience which served as an induction that toughened him for the hard times ahead. In hindsight, he did not think about the consequences of his actions at the time. He claimed to have endured a thorough beating from the police after his uncle reported the theft of his fuel. His brother, who was an accomplice, skipped the border into South Africa as he was much older. What followed thereafter were a series of adventures which included cohabiting with a young prostitute he met on the streets and returning to the streets.

Thumi described his feelings about his first day on the streets as *‘It was like, I’m being relieved from the troubles that I was thinking and faced at home...’*. Thumi claimed that he was overwhelmed by troubles in his family and leaving home for the streets was a relief. However, with hindsight and having become more mature at the time of interview in 2012, Thumi felt that his problems were of his own making as he had failed his middle-secondary school examinations and sought to survive on his own on the streets by seizing opportunities to make money rather than face his parents who were disappointed with his results. He came onto the streets in 2008 when there was a critical shortage and scarcity of all commodities including fuel. He sold bread and other small items on the train up to the border with Mozambique and bought sugar which he sold back in Bulawayo. He joined three other boys and they lived as a group on the streets until they went their separate ways.

Some of the children's first days on the streets were dramatic such as Biggy who found himself on his own when his father deserted him in Harare. He disclosed that his mother had left the country presumably to look for work in South Africa and never returned to the family. Biggy presumed that his father may have also left to look for work in South Africa. Again, this was in 2007/2008, the period most remembered as the most traumatic time in the lives of many Zimbabweans as the economy was at its worst ever. This is what he said about his first day on the streets of Harare before moving to Bulawayo later:

'My first day, ahmm, I went to Chicken Inn. I asked for money and I asked from a lady because ladies are people who we can communicate with easily because they are mothers and have a feeling of having children. So I asked for money and I was eight, in fact I was turning ten. Then when she gave me that money I went and bought food. When I was about to sit down and eat, then came the other guys and they tried to take it by force, but at the end we ate together. They then showed me how to live on the streets. They showed me how to look for food in the bins and how money and food is found on the streets'.

Biggy's first encounter with other street children meant he had to stand up and show character which earned him respect from the seasoned street children. Aged about ten years, he learnt to use his initiative by targeting women; as mothers they are usually seen as symbols of nurture. Biggy's account suggests that street children kept their eyes open for opportunities to exploit and he found himself having to share his food with children that he did not know. It somehow turned out to be a positive experience in that it became his induction and he was accepted into a group of experienced street children.

For others the process of moving from home to the streets was gradual. Hungwe saw an opportunity to make money working as a tout for minibuses operating in the city of Harare. Hungwe lived with his aunt at his late father's house in Mbare (Harare's oldest township). His reasons for leaving home was to *'look for money' (kunotsvaga mari)*. This was the

time when life in Zimbabwe was tough. I sometimes went home but gradually stayed over in town with the other boys’.

Others like Mandava, Jambezi and Mshona, to name a few, had similar experiences to Hungwe’s. Mandava left his rural home in the Midlands Province to live on the streets of Zvishavane, a town located 180 kilometres from Bulawayo and 128 kilometres from Gweru, the third largest city. He moved on to Bulawayo and later went to South Africa. The experiences of some of the street children revealed a pattern of testing of the waters and gradually moved to the street on a more permanent basis. This process can be described as a cognitive as well as an effective appraisal of life on the streets (Felsman, 1988).

Jambezi’s account was that *‘When I came onto the streets I saw some of the guys from Egodini while I was wondering in town still thinking about what to do as my grandmother told me that she was not going to help me even get an identity card. Staying with her was a waste of time as she was not going to do any ‘sh.t’ (street language for nothing) for me.... I then met the guys while I was thinking. I then went to the beer garden to drink alcohol. I had \$5 on me that day. I then joined them and have ever since stayed with them at Egodini’.*

Jambezi used to see the other boys in town before he came to join them. In other words he joined a group of boys he was already familiar with. His account was that:

‘When I came onto the streets I met one of the boys called Mabhatshi (not his real name). We immediately shared our experiences and he brought me to Egodini where I joined the other boys’. Jambezi added that he could not sleep on the first night and still found it difficult almost three months down the line. Jambezi’s first experience of street life had similarities with Nduna and Thumi’s experiences in that he saw the streets as offering some relief to problems that he faced at home.

Mshona claimed to have lived with his brother at his lodgings in Makokoba Township (Bulawayo's oldest township) and used to see the street boys from Egodini where he was doing odd jobs and later decided to join them when his brother left town for the rural areas. Mshona did not move onto the streets instantly but gradually got into the habit of staying with the Egodini group and it was easy for him to just join the group when he made the decision not to return to his brother's lodgings.

The experiences outlined above show that the street represented different things initially to different boys (escape, adventure, cold, hard) and their reasons did differ somewhat. They are brought together by their circumstances of being in an environment where they share experiences as part of finding a common identity. I found that it was common for new arrivals to be easily spotted by those who have lived on the streets much longer. The new entrant wonders around and they are easily identifiable by other street children who tend to patrol the city centre looking for food and other opportunities for making money. For example, three of the boys who slept at Egodini base claimed that *Mabhatshi* found them and brought them to the larger group at the base. For example, Mafana stated, *'I did not encounter problems when I first arrived on the streets. The first person I met is that guy known as Mabhatshi. He took me to Egodini and I joined the other boys who were already living there'*.

Mafana illustrated how he came to be part of the Egodini Group on his first day by stating that Mabhatshi *'found me sitting around a fire in the morning and asked me where I lived. I told him and he invited me to come and stay with him and others at the rooms over Egodini. I had two pairs of shoes and I gave him a pair which was a bigger size for me as he was barefooted. From then on we became friends'*. An individual's appearance in the city centre can tell part of the story about them. The fact that Mabhatshi walked around on bare foot in the city centre made him unique. The city is a place where affluence and

spending whatever money one would have made takes place. Dressing up is for the city centre and thus street children often stand out because they are poorly dressed.

For some children the first day on the streets was a shock and represented a complete new and strange experience. For example, Mvuthu's description of his first day on the streets was, *'I saw other street children digging for food in large bins, something that I did not know. I saw them going inside the large bins. They would eat the food from these bins. Others were sniffing glue'*. This was clearly a shock to a boy from Nkayi (rural area), some 100 kilometres from Bulawayo. The sight of boys going into large bins and digging for food was a new experience and this would never happen in a rural environment as there are completely different means of survival despite rural areas being associated with poverty and backwardness. The urban landscape is not kind to street children and the homeless as the rural environment can be to the most unfortunate members of the community where everyone knows everyone.

The story of the first day on the street would not be complete without an account from a girl on the streets of Bulawayo. Girls consist of a very small number of street children living on the streets and their experiences could be different to those of their male counterparts. Boys on the streets called this young person *Hona Mwana Wako* (which could translate as *'See Your child'*). I had no idea why they decided to call her that. She was an orphan who told a sad story about her journey to the streets all the way from Chegutu in Mashonaland West Province. *Hona Mwana Wako* said, *'I lived briefly in Sizinda with my aunt and my sister. I was sent away from home by my aunt. She burnt my clothes, underwear and shoes. She told me to go and look for money for rent and food'*. She ended up with one of the older street boys who treated her as his wife and declared that *Hona Mwana Wako* was a gift to him from God.

For *Hona Mwana Wako* this was the beginning of a difficult life on the streets as a girl child in an environment where she was vulnerable to sexual exploitation. I will return to this aspect of the girl child on the streets of Bulawayo in a section on gender differences. It was evident from her narrative that she was sent out to prostitute herself as a means to survive. *Hona Mwana Wako* appeared to have some learning difficulty which made her more vulnerable.

There were mixed feelings about the first day in the streets. For some of the children it brings a sense of relief from whatever hardships they faced at home. The first day experiences represent a departure from routines and boundaries that are associated with the home environment to life determined by the need to survive straight from the point of entry onto the streets. Madobha summed up what the streets offer to street children by stating that '*There is independence in terms of what you want to do and where you want to go*'. On the other hand some found the first day very difficult and probably the experience would remain in their minds for a long time.

The newly arrived goes through a process of initiation and has to be accepted within a small group before finding their feet in the larger 'street children community'. The very nature of their circumstances such as being in a location (city centre) at a time when most people return home makes new arrivals easy to identify by others in similar situations. In a way the new arrivals have to negotiate to be part of the group by way of association or meeting a need, usually, when looking for a place to sleep. The first day experiences signify individual journeys converging on the streets where new friendship networks are developed and in turn shape their time of life on the streets as well as their future aspirations. The experiences are also evidence of the emotional trauma they encounter on arrival on the streets. It seems that the difficulties faced in early life are a catalyst to solidify on even when faced with sleeping rough. Unless and until the street children's first

experiences are understood in the context of their background and where they are coming from, the phenomenon of street children will remain elusive for many to understand.

During the first phase of fieldwork (on two occasions) new arrivals were encountered at the Contact Centre and it was interesting to witness the integration with the already established street children. Smally was found sleeping on the veranda of a shop during the first fieldwork phase claiming that he was hungry and was taken to the Contact Centre where he joined other street children over a meal. He quickly made friends and left for the city centre in the afternoon with boys of his age group. Two new arrivals claimed to have been directed to the Contact Centre by people in town. One of the new arrivals had a mobile phone and played music on his phone which became a major attraction as most of the boys wanted to listen to the music. The new arrivals became part of the group by the end of the day when they left the Contact Centre for the city centre. However the young person who had a mobile phone paid a price the next day when it was stolen while charging at the Contact Centre.

Street children find linking with others essential for survival and reducing vulnerability in a rather hostile public and private space. In other words, surviving on the streets is a group activity as no street child can survive on their own. It is evident from the accounts described in this section that this is learnt soon on arrival. At times the induction can be brutal (as Biggy learnt) and compliance may be the solution. The fact that there is strength in numbers cannot be overemphasised. What follows the next day tends to cement their position in a group and the formation of a street child identity and adapting to life on the streets follows the induction. The evidence from the interviews show that first day experiences are life changing and shape the days, weeks, months and for many, years to come, living on the margins.

7.4 Adapting to life on the streets

This section looks at how life progresses after the first day on the streets and how street children make changes to their routines and habits to suit their new environment. It is important to move on to look at what happens next in order to understand the social processes in the ‘transformation’ of the children’s lives to become ‘street children’.

Conticini (2008:414) provides a succinct description of what happens next in his study:

‘The street becomes an indelible mark on the child’s identity and reputation’. Conticini further points out that the street children’s identity tend to be associated with the surroundings in which they live - the street environment being dirty, noisy, crowded and violent at times.

The above resonates with Biggy’s reflection on what changed for him when he came to live on the streets aged about 10 years. Biggy said *‘Life changes completely because here on the streets there are no blankets or any shelter above your head’.* He summed up by saying *‘...life starts a bit difficult but as time progresses you start to dance the same tune with others.... Just by following others you will become addicted to the environment’.* As demonstrated in the preceding section, new arrivals go through an ‘induction’ process, firstly by sleeping without any blankets and then moving on to finding food the next day. This was a common experience among street children whereby they were quickly absorbed into existing groups on arrival and shown how to live on the streets.

The process of initiation into street life is similar to an induction at a university where a new student may arrive alone but soon makes friends with fellow students as they move around within the university. The already established street children show the newly arrived how to live on the streets (including how to look for food or money). In the process an exchange of information including disclosures of personal details may develop into initial friendships. These friendship networks may or may not last long and new

friendships may be formed later. In other words friendships evolve as they progress to negotiate their position within the new setting. In the process group cohesion is developed and spheres of influence as a group are established. For street children, strength in numbers appears to be a strategy to deal with rivalry and vulnerability.

Throughout the two field visits it was clear that no street child can survive on his or her own as they often moved in small groups. Street children tend to look after one another at the best of times. This was evident in the accounts in the earlier section where a number of boys were introduced to the larger group by Mabhatshi and group membership was taken.

Finding food ranks high on daily priorities and that starts very early when shops open for business. Referring to why it is crucial to step up for the hunt for food and money, Nduna said *'if you wait, you will eat later'*. Biggy described an established routine for almost all street boys *'to go behind the shops when they remove litter, all breakages and food that has not been eaten or left the day before. They throw it into bins, the big ones and then you start 'digiraring' inside the bins'*. The term *'digiraring'* is street language for digging for food from bins.

To illustrate the point on how they got food from food outlets and supermarkets, Madobha said (referring to TM Bradfield), *'There is a lot of food that is thrown away at TM. The food includes buns, cakes, meat, fruits and vegetables... This usually happens on Mondays and Sundays from morning to afternoon...'*. He added that *'you don't get things like that at home'*. This may be interpreted as an indication of deprivation in his background. There is competition for access to food outlets or sources and in most cases street children's groups tended to exercise territorial control. Binga described an incident where he spotted a shop worker in Gweru dropping off food in a bin and tried to move it to pick up the food parcel and got beaten up by a group who had control of the bin. The bin was being monitored by a group of street boys.

Fights often break out between rival groups for control of 'digging sites'. For example the Egodini group was banned from digging for food at OK Supermarket because of fights with other groups. Street children know all the bins in the city and the times when food is thrown out of food outlets. For example, Spox knew all the bins around town where street children dig for food and who controlled the various bins. The rule is that digging into someone's bin is not allowed. He used numbers like Bin Number 15, 16, 17 and so on. There was one bin that he referred to as 50-50 which he explained was open to anyone. Although he used numbers to describe the location of the bins there were no numbers on any of the bins. Even begging for money in someone else's area is not welcome. Straying into another group's area is usually met with real aggression as was observed one evening when two young boys encroached onto another group's area and were met with aggression forcing them to retreat.

Adapting to life on the street seems to be quite difficult for many street children. Jambezi provided a succinct expression about how he found adapting to life on the streets difficult. He said *'I was not used to digging for food in bins or picking up left overs. Even now it is still difficult for me and that is why I go to wait for unwanted food at OK Supermarket in the morning'*. Jambezi had been living on the streets for three months at the time of the interview in August 2013 but still had not fully adapted to life on the streets.

Describing how his appearance deteriorated after some days sleeping rough on the streets of Bulawayo, Nduna said he sold his pair of shoes to raise money for food and his feet turned black as he walked the streets barefoot. As a consequence *'I decided to spend the day asleep and only came to town in the evening'*, Nduna said. By so doing he avoided meeting people he knew and would even look away or down if he saw someone he knows. This was also Thumi's way of dealing with his new found status of a street child. Within a short time they drift into the margins and eventually become the 'other'.

Adapting to life on the streets is a continuous process and new habits are learnt. A street child's identity is formed by what they tend to do such as digging for food in bins, an activity common with street children and homeless people as well as sleeping rough. It seemed to me during fieldwork that once they adapt to some form of street routine, the idea of home or family becomes a distant reality. It gets to a point of no return which is often referred to in Ndebele as '*Kude emuva kude phambili*' (the starting point is too far and so *is the way ahead*'). They are 'home' on the streets as described in Hecht's (1998) account of life of street children of North East Brazil.

The hardships on the streets do not necessarily send them back home. This is probably due to the hardships that many sought to escape. The 'street community' made of street children alongside homeless adults becomes a substitute for the immediate family. The decline in living standards and appearance sets in very quickly through sleeping rough, lack of bathing facilities and change of clothes. Routines and boundaries as known from home or family including schooling become irrelevant to street children. They become trapped in a cycle where each day sees similar routines until they take things for granted and spend their time doing the same things over and over again.

7.5 Their places on the streets

This section looks at places that street children see as 'home' (figuratively). Ennew and Swart-Kruger (2003:7) postulate that '*Street children are perceived to inhabit, or be visible in, places and spaces that are not 'homes'*'. It was evident in this study that there are multiple potential habitats which they can use to meet their social and physical needs and thereby develop and construct their own subcultures and identities (Beazley, 2003; Lucchini, 1996a). Street children in Bulawayo identified these places as 'bases' signifying an identifiable place (physical) and space that they occupy.

It is necessary to examine how these places are viewed by street children as well as by the public. In the process I will unpick what street children said about some of the places as well as highlight personal observations during fieldwork in Bulawayo. I approached the research site having very little knowledge as to how street children live on the streets day in and day out. This was a chance to get closer to them and get to know what is going on from street children themselves. Much of the information on how they live on the streets was obtained from conversations, interviews and observations made during visits to the streets at different places including night visits.

One of the main research questions is how street children use space and negotiate their daily living in spaces and places in an urban environment governed by Local Government by-laws. It is the case that in urban areas there are certain groups of individuals who are considered illegitimate in public spaces and places and street children are such a group (Hecht, 1998). Yet, we still find them being part of the urban landscape in many countries around the world. Perhaps this leads to the question of place and space in relation to their being on the streets and business district much longer than many 'ordinary' people. In the widest sense, the functions of street spaces change between day and night. For example, a pavement can become a sleeping place at night and an alley can become a meeting point or sleeping place at different times of the day for street children.

I looked at the meaning of place by adopting Tuan's (1977:408-409) concept that *'in ordinary usage, place means primarily two things: one's position in society and spatial location....People are defined first by their positions in society, their characteristic life styles ... the foods they eat and the places at which they live and work'*. Applied to street children, this concept captures the main characteristics of place as posited by Creswell (1996) as to how people shape a place for different purposes as well making these places meaningful. Others like John Agnew (a political geographer), see place as location, locale

(material setting for social relations) and a sense of place as three elements that make place meaningful (Agnew, 2011).

In relation to street children encountered during fieldwork, bases (where they sleep) carry a sense of familiarity and the meaning given to place is related to what people do there and how they will defend it against others. Describing how street children establish or identify bases, Thumi said *'Like making bases, they can patrol the whole town easily. When they find a place that is comfortable to sleep, that's their home for that particular time, and when they are there they don't want any trouble from anyone'*. They impose their own norms around the place mainly to deter outsiders. One can be an outsider by way of language or culture. In other words place is socially constructed as well as culturally constructed and 'owned' by a group of street children. In essence, place is somehow linked to space. To adopt Tuan's (1997) view, space was considered as allowing movement where place is seen as a pause, carrying a sense of involvement and belonging.

In this study street children's places carried a sense of belonging and ownership thereby signalling exclusion to 'others'. It is imperative to examine how these places meet different needs for street children. There are places of 'residence' (where they sleep) and places of leisure (where they play) as well as places of work (where they look for food. Some of the places are secluded from the public eye.

As stated in Chapter Six, street children live in groups of about four to 20 or more in different places around the city. Throughout fieldwork 13 sites were identified around the city where street children slept. These included public spaces and places as well as secluded areas. Some of the places were not easily accessible such as the disused rail wagons only reachable by going under the wagons. These are consistent with the definition of street children's places (see UNICEF definition in the literature review chapter).

Figure 10. Disused rail wagons used as a base



Source: Picture taken on 13 /08/2013 at Bulawayo Railway Station

The disused wagons signify the economic decline. Musa Dube, writing for *The Standard* paints a grim picture of the once renowned train station which saw the first train arrive from the Cape Colony in October 1987. *'The railway station is now a place of rusty, smelly and run-down coaches and wagons scattered all over the place'*, writes Musa Dube in an article entitled *'Rusty shells, obsolete wagons: The sad story of rail transport'* (*The Standard* 15 June 2014). These wagons have become shelter for street children.

The visit to this base was an eye opener as I found out that there was once a baby born on the streets and lived there for a while with his parents. My informants (a Support Worker from Thuthuka Street Children Project and Makumbo, who is a street child) told me that this base was for couples but they have all left the city. I found a baby walker in the wagon and evidence of cooking having been done in the wagon (see picture below). This was an interesting development which I later followed up with the father of the child (Member) who happened to come back onto the streets following an unsuccessful rehabilitation with

the family in the rural areas of Mashonaland. Member told me that his baby was six months old and was in Gweru with his mother. Interestingly, he was with another girl in Bulawayo and he told me that he is a charmer and girls on the streets like him. There seemed to be some truth in that because he was involved in a fight over another girl in January 2012 on my last day of the first fieldwork phase. Member promised to bring the mother and baby back to Bulawayo for me to see his child (Unfortunately I did not get to see the mother and baby). The Field officer confirmed that the baby was indeed born to two street children and was very healthy and there were no grounds to remove from the parents.

Figure 11: Inside a disused wagon with a baby walker.



Source: Picture taken at Bulawayo Railway Station on 13/08/2013

At the time of the visit in August 2013 it appeared that no one lived there. However, indications are that the wagons are used as a ‘home’ at different times of the year such as during the cold season as a recent picture below shows a group of young people inside a disused wagon

Figure 12: Street children at ‘home’ in a disused wagon during the cold season.



Source: Courtesy of Chronicle, June 24, 2014.

I noted that there was a tendency among street children to choose locations where access is not easy. One such example was Madala’s base close to the International Trade Fair Grounds. I accessed the base by jumping over a fast flowing stream (the water was mixed with sewage and industrial waste). Again this base was chosen for its seclusion with the stream acting as a deterrent to intruders. At the back there is a strong brick wall which belongs to the International Trade Fair Grounds leaving the only direct access via the deep end of the stream (see picture on page 175).

Figure 13. A helping hand from Madala to access his base



Source: Picture taken in December 2011

Whenever the street children decide to set up a base like this one, plastics and cardboard boxes are used to build the shelter. The base may not withstand bad weather like storms or cold weather hence street children would use shop verandas or disused rail wagons.

Figure 14. Madala sitting outside his base



Source: Picture taken in December 2011.

Access to the above base was negotiated with Madala, the Base Leader. A leadership structure emerged during negotiations that each base had a Base Leader and a Blanket Leader. It was through talking to street children that it became apparent that there are certain attributes for one to be the Base Leader such as being a proven fighter. That enables the individual to impose his command over a number of street children. A Base Leader is like the 'Alpha Male' in the animal world. There is also a Blanket Leader, who is in charge of the group's blankets. Having a blanket on the streets earns the owner some favour as many would want to huddle under the blanket at night.

Often blankets and a few belongings are hidden during the day while they go about their business mainly searching for food in the city centre. It was common for a few of them to have no belongings except for the clothes that they were wearing. At Madala's base there were four boys living at this shack. There were other shacks nearby which belonged to homeless male adults. I was warned that some of the homeless male adults were violent and do not like people coming to the base. By any standards this is not a place to visit for ordinary people particularly at night time.

Madala reported that at times two girls came over to sleep and two of the boys would make way and sleep outside the shack. They slept in a row with the feet towards the 'door' as a way to protect their faces from any attacks while asleep. During the visit a meal was being prepared by one of the boys whom the Base Leader referred to as 'my garden boy'. This was traditional African vegetables (*umbida wolude*) which were in abundance during the rainy season. Their cooking skills were impressive and I had a taste of the vegetables (of course after checking the source of the water was the Contact Centre). One of the boys who accompanied me to the base said that in the past they caught fish in the stream and they had them for their evening meals. Mabree claimed (in her interview) that the water on the particular stream can be very dirty and they were rumours that it was used for cleaning dead bodies at a mortuary upstream. This claim appeared far-fetched as from my

knowledge of Bulawayo there was no such mortuary in the area and it could have been industrial waste instead. Nonetheless these claims represent the most extreme aspects of street children's lives.

One of the dangerous places where some street children live is the Bulawayo Centenary Park. This used to be Bulawayo's most popular park located east of the town centre and close to the National Museum. This is one place where people go to have their wedding pictures taken at the famous fountain. The base is located beyond the bushes (See picture below) and street children have for quite some time made this part of the park their 'home'.

Figure 15: Centenary Park (1)



Source: Picture taken on 14/12/2011

It is at the far end of the park that they have positioned themselves quite far away from the busy Bulawayo-Gwanda Road (the road links Bulawayo to South Africa via Beitbridge Border post to the south and other cities to the east of the country). The park was once Bulawayo's pride but has been neglected and has deteriorated like many public facilities in the city.

Figure 16: Centenary Park (2)



Source: Picture taken in 14/12/2011

The shrubs and the pillars serve as a reminder of the old days when the city council was able to run and maintain its facilities. Street children I met at the Contact Centre warned me not to venture beyond the white pillars especially at night time because there were muggers out there. Most of the boys on the streets described the youths from the park as criminals. This is one of the places where most of the girls who come onto the streets at night spend the day sleeping. In 2011 I ventured close to the secluded area of the park which used to house some wild animals like the ostrich, impala and a variety of birds. I wondered around and observed from a distance that they were clothes drying close to a disused shelter but I could not see whether they were people there. The sign of washing suggested that they were people there as leaving clothes unattended would attract others to help themselves. One of the tragedies reported by street children during formal conversations in 2014 was that of a former street girl known as Sdudla (her name suggest that she was heavily built) was found dead with stab wounds in early 2013 at the Centenary Park.

One of the familiar places for street children I was shown was a disused septic tank near an old toilet at Bulawayo Train Station. The decline in facilities is clear for anyone to see as soon as one walks into the station. It is here that street children find shelter at night including a disused septic tank (below which I described as a home in the ground).

Figure 17. A 'home' in the ground



Source: Picture taken in August 2013

In this picture Vusani, a Support Worker from Thuthuka was standing inside a disused septic tank near the old public toilet at Bulawayo Railway Station. They removed the manhole cover and access is by jumping down through the manhole. There was evidence of fires made outside as well as inside. This place was used mainly during the cold season and it was no surprise that there were no street children living there on a regular basis when I visited the base in August 2013 because it was quite hot during that period.

Sleeping inside the septic tank compensates for lack of blankets. I was informed by one of the street children who accompanied me to the base that at some point there were between 15 to 20 street children living there. Again this place becomes a no go area at night as there is a high risk of being mugged.

The most popular places or bases were Egodini and Emkotweni (see Figures 18 and 19). About twenty children were reported to be sleeping at the two bases on most nights. Street children come together in the evening and usually share a meal and chat before going to sleep. Egodini is located at the main terminus on the edge of the city centre and is a hive of activity during the day for commuters coming into and leaving the city centre. Most of them would be returning home to the western suburbs normally referred to as *Emalokitshini* (literally translated means Location) where the majority of the residents live. The name Egodini is derived from the sunken terrain where the terminus was built. The terminus becomes a 'home' for street children who use disused ticket offices as 'bedrooms'. A lot of vegetable and fruit vendors sell fruits to commuters until late into the night making it difficult for street children to sleep. Street children would only sleep when there is less movement around and also wake up early when people going to the market start arriving. It came as no surprise that the group from Egodini spent quite a lot of time (during the day) sleeping at the Contact Centre particularly after a difficult night.

Figure 18. Asleep at night at Egodini (August 2013)



For example, the boys described police brutality whenever they investigated a crime believed to be linked to street children. On occasions they have been subjected to beatings at night. They described a night when unknown males attacked them and they survived attempted stabbings but one homeless man ended up in hospital with a stab wound. Violence and victimisations are experiences that are common for street children.

Emkotweni is a reference to an alley located in the middle of the city centre. The alley was a focal point for a lot of street children during the day because of its strategic location to food outlets as well as providing cover from the public. This is one place that they easily identified with and it gave a meaning and purpose to their everyday life. The alley is located between TG Silundika Street and RG Mugabe Way. I visited this alley on several occasions in August 2013 after discovering that a lot of street children passed through sometimes just to rest or cook meals or just sit around to chat. More important this was a place where a large number of street children returned to sleep at night. This site had a lot of rubbish, rubble as well as human waste as a result of lack of toilet facilities in the vicinity.

Figure 19. Emkotweni base



Source: Picture of *Hona Mwana Wako* resting Emkotweni with a blanket beside her and a pot after cooking a meal (August 2013)

In reality, an alley is both a public and private space in that it serves as an access point to the back of the businesses and a short cut to the streets. However, an alley can be the most dangerous place of an inner city neighbourhood. Fialko and Hampton (2011:3) described alleys as *'places of dramas- enticing in their narrow linearity, exciting in their perceived risk, and scaled as stage sets, where the human body figures large against a constrained backdrop and directed lighting. Alleys can be, therefore, described as being about movement, whether by individuals taking shortcuts or vehicles accessing business backdoors'*. This particular alley had all the characteristics described above. More so it was a place of dramas for me during fieldwork in August 2013. I will return to the dramas and encounters with street children in this alley.

7.6 The politics of the alley

In the Bulawayo context an alley is a place where 'bad' things take place. Alleys are narrow streets, usually not maintained and fly tipping is prevalent. It is one of the neglected areas of the city and a place which many people tend to avoid during the day and at all costs at night due to poor lighting and associated risks. During the day muggers would run through the alley leaving their victims helpless in the alley and disappear into the crowds on the main streets. Alleys are known to be a haven for prostitutes and their clients at night. It so happens that this particular alley is a 'home' to street children and homeless adults. The graffiti around the alley bears testimony of some of the people (including contemporaries) who have lived or stayed there. As can be seen from the picture (below), it serves as a place to sit around 'hidden' from the busy streets. Looking around the rubble I found evidence of solvents having been used such as Bron Clear (a strong cough syrup from South Africa). The street children told me that it was more intoxicating than alcohol. None of the children admitted using the syrup. I also learnt that Woods Cough Syrup was commonly used by street children on top of other hallucinogens like glue and marijuana.

Figure 20: Emkotweni (a place to relax)



Source: Picture taken in August 2013

This particular alley turned out to be ‘a place of drama’ during my second fieldwork. I had three interesting encounters at this particular alley during the second phase of fieldwork. One afternoon three men walked into the alley to smoke marijuana close to where I was with a group of street boys oblivious of who I was. I even joked with them about sharing a joint which they gladly offered. I made the joke in order to gain their trust and not to raise any suspicions about my identity. I enhanced my ability to observe closely what was going on without influencing any change in the circumstances. It was interesting to note that they invoked the traditional Ndebele notion of sharing saying that ‘*the stuff is for everyone, old man*’ (yikudla komuntu wonke mdala). Knowing or bearing in mind the notoriety of an alley I quickly made an excuse and left them enjoying the joint around the boys. I was mindful of experiences of other researchers such as Whyte (1955) in a study of a group of street corner society where an offer to join a group ended up with one man threatening to throw him downstairs. I went back later and learnt from the boys that they were given a go

at the joint. It appeared this was something that the men did on a regular basis and they were familiar to the boys.

The second incident was a fight that broke out one afternoon between a street boy and his new girlfriend. This was unexpected and was quite spontaneous. It started with the boy (Godlwayo) bringing food for the girl (Meddie). The girl presented as a tough cookie (tough talking) declaring that it was the '*man's duty to ensure that the woman is fed*' and that she expected her boyfriend to go out and look for food and bring it to her at the base. It was interesting to observe the dynamics of the relationship between a girl and a boy on the streets unfolding. While Godlwayo appeared hungry, he simply let the girl have the food which was a take away from a nearby food out (said to have cost \$1.00). In the meantime the girl told him to go and fetch water for her to bath. He went across the street to fetch water with a bucket. It appeared that Godlwayo wanted some quiet time with the girl in the disused toilets in the alley but the girl had other ideas. Things suddenly turned ugly when the girl decided she was leaving for her 'base' at the Golf Club and Godlwayo tried to stop her from leaving by dragging her into the disused toilet behind the furniture shop. Suddenly a serious fight broke out between the two with the girl throwing bricks at Godlwayo. I was caught up in the crossfire with the girl grabbing me by the neck in a rather hysterical state. My iPhone was knocked off by the girl across the concrete slab as she picked a fight with another boy who was taking photographs of the incident. I had to intervene and asked the children to calm down. The girl left (hurriedly) the alley and I never saw her again.

Soo after the incident, a homeless youth walked into the alley and went straight to a disused toilet where Godlwayo had retreated after the fight with the girl. He had apparently locked himself inside the toilet during the fight with Meddie. The youth just walked past and banged on the door for Godlwayo to open shouting that it was his base in the past and he wanted access. The youth was quite aggressive and I noticed that the other boys fell

silent and I did not see Godlwayo come out. I suspected something amiss was happening and decided that it was time to leave the alley. It turned out that the youth was a former street child and he was selling sweets down the main road. I did not get to know what he was doing in the toilet.

One night visit to a four boys sleeping at the corner of the Main Post Office building revealed what happens when street children huddle together at night. This group comprised an older boy with three young boys. I approached the base in the company of a Support Worker from Thuthuka Street Children Project at around 9.00 pm. The base is situated along one of the busiest streets in Bulawayo which serves as a gateway to the western suburbs and enroute to the terminus (Egodini). This group of boys slept on the pavement with hardly any blankets (see picture below).

Figure 21. Time to entertain



Source: A performance by the group during a night visit (at a Corner of the main Post Office building) in August 2013.

The yellow pack contains glue which I found them sniffing and they gave me a demonstration of how it is done. The performance came from nowhere and the boys appeared to be high on glue. These boys were only at the base for about four days before they abandoned the place due to members of the public kicking them at night while they were asleep. They eventually moved to Emkotweni.

Figure 22. Making money on the streets



Source: Picture of a street boy standing on stilts on a busy street (September 2011)

There is one particular difference in respect of younger boys who tend to sleep on shop verandas or public places open throughout the night whereas older boys tend to place themselves away from open public places for some privacy. Younger street boys use open space at night in order to maintain visibility to the public. For example, sleeping close to a night club or a 24 hour shop ensures that they remain in the public eye and most of the places have security guards. There are police patrols in the town centre and other popular

places including night clubs. One such place is the Bulawayo Centre where I was told that about 15 boys slept.

Figure 23: Bulawayo Centre base for younger boys



The Bulawayo Centre Shopping complex is popular with younger boys. They sleep on the veranda on the right of the traffic light (shown on this picture in front of the yellow truck). On an evening visit to the area I witnessed a confrontation between various groups of boys where two boys had encroached into another group's territory and they were met with aggression. This group slept on the pavement and kept their few belongings in some spaces at the bottom of the building and these were referred as 'wardrobes' (See Figure 25). A closer look into the wardrobe revealed empty bottles of beer. It was at this base where I met young Bhule whom I saw in December 2011. He had grown to become a seasoned street boy.

Figure 24. The wardrobes



Source: Picture taken on 2 September 2013.

As it is the case with these contested places, opposition, resistance and subversion can be played out over the right to space (Mitchell, 2003). Ennew and Swart-Kruger (2003:8) state that '*street space is criminal space, especially at night*'. Some of the places where street children sleep or spend time are considered not pleasant by the public and by some of the street children. The Centenary Park, the Golf Course and Railways are known to street kids as dangerous places. For example a Bulawayo newspaper, The Chronicle, carried a headline '*Street kids shove a knife into prostitute's private parts*' (2 July 2014). This took place at the Centenary Park.

Creswell (1995) postulates that there are collective 'myths' about space and the use of space being dependent on individual or group characteristics. I found this pertinent in relation to street children's places of abode both during the day and at night. For example, bases are considered by street children to be out of 'bounds' to people other than street children themselves. During negotiations for access to bases with a group of street children

at Thuthuka Contact Centre one of the most influential boys at the time, Jussie, remarked in Shona that '*Kumabase akuswikwe*', meaning '*The bases are not open for access*'. It appeared that group consent was necessary in order for an outsider to gain access. This lends weight to the assertion by Holland *et al* (2007) that public spaces are imbued with power relations and access or exclusion depends on the degree to which they might be deemed 'in' or 'out' of place. In the end my first access to a base at the time was facilitated by none other than the most vocal and influential, Jussie. Throughout the fieldwork phase, access to some of the bases was through street children.

Street children lay claim to space and places in an urban environment. Once claimed these spaces and places are subject to unwritten rules that are observed by street children. A 'base' is one such place and is central to street children. It is a special place for street children where they retreat to sleep at night or during the day to cook or share the food they have managed to get during their daily searches. The 'bases' are located at various locations across the city and membership is rooted mainly in friendship networks (see Appendix Four). Some of the places are deserted during the day and the residents can only be found at night. They then wait until it is quiet before going into the shelters to sleep on hard floors or on cardboard boxes with no blankets.

In relation to street children in Bulawayo I would argue that space and place are the most important elements in shaping their lives on the streets. Both terms denote common experiences as propounded by Tuan (1997: 3) who argues that '*We live in space. Place is security, space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other*'. All the places that street they go to after a long day's work lack the comfort of home. Street children contest space and relevance in the social and economic pond in the urban environment. The story of street children's places and spaces show how they maintain a presence by asserting themselves and to some extent gain control of certain areas. It was apparent that girls have different experiences on the streets as they did not feature much in

the places visited and if they ever did they were a small minority compared to boys who maintain visibility around the city centre.

7.7 Gender differences

The gender differences among boys and girls living on the streets of Bulawayo are profound as evidenced in the demographics section where boys far outnumber their female counterparts. This trend was evident in both the first and second phase of fieldwork.

During the first phase I saw only two girls and interviewed one of them. Out of the six 'new' girls seen during the second phase I managed to interview one of them. I had brief conversations with two other girls in the presence of their boyfriends. Having a girlfriend on the streets comes with a responsibility of making sure that other boys do not have a chance of having a sexual liaison with her. This has implications for research in that the boyfriends had an influence as to what their girlfriends could say or even accessing them for an interview would prove to be difficult. In total there were about seven girls (including a former street child) believed to have been living on the streets in August/September 2013.

In 2011 the ratio of boys to girls among children living on the streets in Bulawayo was 1:11 and in 2013 it was about 1:10. Studies on street children in Zimbabwe and worldwide have come to similar findings with regards to the composition of street children. Two surveys conducted in Harare by Nyandiya-Bundy and Muchini (1991) and the Zimbabwe Council of Welfare of Children (1989) established that the majority of street children were boys aged between eight and 18 years. Other studies by UNICEF (1991) and Wakatama (2007) on street children in Zimbabwe came to similar conclusions about the gender differences where boys far outnumber girls. Therefore, this disproportionate representation of girls on the streets, although glaring, was not surprising.

The gender imbalance is not unique to Bulawayo or Zimbabwe as other studies from elsewhere around the world show higher numbers of boys living on the streets than girls. Aptekar (1988), and Felsman (1991) quoted by Lalor (1999) found that 75 per cent of street children in Columbia were boys and only 25 per cent were girls. Other countries like Angola, Ethiopia and Zambia had 84 per cent, 76 per cent and 70 per cent respectively. In Sudan nearly 100 per cent of the street child population was boys. A study by le Roux (1996) found that in South Africa street children were typically black males. Others like Aderinto (2000), Berhane (1997) and Wright et al (1993) quoted by Ali et al (2004) argued that girls accounted for between 10-15 per cent of street children worldwide.

There are many reasons for this disparity but in most cases they are related or linked to cultural meanings of childhood and the diverse socio-cultural factors that exist in many societies around the world. There are different expectations in relation to girls and boys in many communities. Beazley (2002) argues that the presence of girls on the street is considered more of an 'abomination' than the boys as they are considered 'out of place' as they enter into a masculine space which is outside the family or home. Some of the factors are to do with the protection accorded girls in communities around the world. For example, Connolly (1990) suggests that girls are likely to remain within the home as they usually perform household tasks and often care for younger siblings.

Aptekar (1997) provides a good example in relation to boys in Kenya who are socialised to become independent at a younger age than girls who are mainly encouraged to stay at home. Even on the streets the odds are against the girl child who is taken advantage of by fellow street boys and homeless male adults. It is interesting to note that the girls living on the streets of Bulawayo do not enjoy living independently from boys or homeless youths or adults and they tend to locate themselves within a particular group of boys or former street children who offer them some form of protection against other boys or homeless youths. Veale and Dona (2003) point out that the Muslim culture in Khartoum dictates that it is

inappropriate for girls to wonder around unaccompanied on the streets. Girls living on the streets are at risk of sexual abuse (Muchini and Nyadiya-Bundy, 1991). George described his initial role when he came onto the streets of Bulawayo as that of keeping an eye on girlfriends of older street children when they went out to look for food.

The nature of the street girls' everyday activities makes them less visible during the day than boys. It is not uncommon for girls to be visible during night times. This was the case with most of the girls during phase two of fieldwork. For example, some girls were reported to be spending the day in a secluded area of the Centenary Park and coming into town at night. They tend to frequent two popular pubs in the city, namely Waverley Bar and Gijima. The experiences of two street girls interviewed in this study confirm the above. Hona Mwana Wako shared her experience of contracting a sexually transmitted infection from two men she met at Waverley Bar and had sexual intercourse with them in a secluded area of the city. She was assisted by other street children who got her a taxi to take her to the clinic for treatment. Within three months she had contracted another sexually transmitted infection. On a night visit to Waverley Bar in August 2013, my informants (two older street children) told me that punters preferred young girls. On leaving the premises at around 11.00 pm there were three young girls (appeared to be about 13 -15) standing a few yards from the entrance who happened to be street girls. They were not allowed onto the premises due to being under age. My informants (street boys) reported that the girls lived at the Centenary Park.

The risk of contracting HIV/AIDS is very high for girls as well as for boys. Mabree one of the older girls (in 2011) disclosed that she used to engage in prostitution by frequently visiting Waverley Bar and Hotel. She disclosed in 2011 that she was HIV positive and was on antiretroviral treatment (ARV) and accessed condoms from the Matabeleland AIDS Network who shared premises with Thuthuka Contact Centre. In an interview recorded in 2011 she disclosed that most of the boys knew of her HIV positive status and did not mind

having sex with her. I found out that some of the boys knew about her HIV status and seemed not to care. There appeared to be a lack of awareness of sexual health issues among street children in an environment where boys outnumber girls. DJ, one of the boys remarked in an informal discussion at the alley, *‘No street child will die from eating food from the bins. Most of the boys are going to die of HIV/AIDS because they all take chances to sleep with the few girls on the streets’*.

My observations in 2013 suggest that the majority of the girls living on the streets in Bulawayo engage in low level prostitution and surface at night when they visit night spots like Waverley Bar and Gijima. Relationships with street boys are intermittent and often result in conflict among the boys. In August 2013 I observed that some of the older boys had fresh scars and these were a result of fights over girls. The fights tend to also involve friends trying to defend their mates.

An insight into relationships between boys and girls was provided by Nduna. The relationships were described as very complex in that the girl would go to the bar to make money from prostitution while the boy went begging or doing piece jobs. They would then pool together their takings at the end of the day as they live as married couples. Nduna described some dangerous practices when girls become pregnant. He described a process whereby the girl would drink ‘hot stuff’ (alcoholic beverages) on an empty stomach and would endure a violent abortion. Social Services tend to intervene when street children have babies on the streets by assisting them to re-unite with families or relatives. This was the case with Mabree when she had her first child whom she later left with relatives in the rural areas and returned to the streets.

7.8 The shape of their stories

This section focuses on how street children tell their life stories and make meaning of their experiences. Every street child I spoke to during fieldwork had a captivating story to tell

about their life experiences while living at home with parents, relatives or other carers as well as the current situation (living on the streets, the ups and downs). It was apparent throughout the study that the stories were constructed in such a way that they portrayed the individual as a 'victim' who had to make a decision to free themselves from an unjust family or home environment. From the conversations and interviews that I had with street children I established that most of the children had poor family backgrounds. Most of their stories were characterised by hardships within their families of origin and even those who came from much better families felt they were victims.

Most of the street children used external or environmental causes as opposed to internal or individual self-blaming explanations to describe their individual journeys to life on the streets. However, there are some who claimed to come from well to do families such as one of the boys, Mshona, who claimed that his mother was a newly elected Member of Parliament while one the boys Njiva reported that he was a son of a prominent South African musician. The story was corroborated by the Field Officer who obtained information about the boy's mother as being steeped in controversy about traditional healing and spirituality. The Field Officer reported that they had one boy who briefly came to the streets whose parent was a company director and lived in the most affluent suburb of Bulawayo. One of the interesting comments about street children stories came from Thumi and Hungwe who respectively said '*All street children are liars*' while Hungwe said '*very few of the street children were chased away from home by parents or relatives but came to the streets because of the love for money*'. The two formed their views as a result of their experiences as well as insiders with first-hand knowledge shared by their counterparts.

It is imperative to note that street children cross many 'boundaries' and 'borders' before making a semi-permanent home on the streets of Bulawayo. Children from rural backgrounds appear to make a quick adjustment to the urban environment by assimilation into existing groups. The rural environment is completely different from an urban

environment in terms of streets lights, volume of traffic and a different economic environment. In the rural context the community plays an important role in raising children whereas in urban areas it is the nuclear family's responsibility to raise children. Once on the streets their daily experiences become uniform as they develop a common identity around being homeless.

The street is like a blank canvas where street children's life experiences are 'written'. It is, therefore, by way of engaging with them at their 'chosen' environment that these experiences could be understood. The shapes of their stories are a construction based on what they see as the key elements of their life experiences and probably constructed in such a way that they project themselves as victims of injustice from their families of origin and a group of children that nobody cares about. I developed a sense that probably society does not give them a second look unless they crossed the line or interfered with the interests of business or the public. Living on the margins means that their stories can only be told to those who spend time with them or else they remain untold. This is where ethnographic methods proved helpful in the study of life experiences of street children in Bulawayo.

7.9 Their future aspirations

I want to sort myself out. I would like to set my own small business of buying and selling mobile phones. I am planning to go back to South Africa to look for a job and after months I would be able to start my own small business. By the Grace of God, I think I will one day make it in life. I was raised under the Seventh Day Adventist Church and I believe strongly that, God willing, I can even get to America'.

Source: Extract from Hungwe's interview on 20/12/2011).

The above is a statement of intent which shows ambition and determination on the part of Hungwe. All the street children spoken to during fieldwork aspire to be something or be

somewhere in time and place in their lives. However, some of the aspirations tend to border on the unrealistic as the odds appear to be against them in that they lack the means or essentials like education and skills to achieve these well expressed aspirations. The study looked at the aspirations of street children in the context of their current situation where they find themselves caught up in the daily cycle of waking up to look for food and money in order to survive to the next day. Street children arrive on the streets with the hope that they will be taking control of their lives, free from structure and routine found at home to become a group of young people for whom the street becomes ‘home’. For many that sense of hope soon turns into despair and the ‘road’ back home fades into distant memory.

Below is an example of street children’s future aspirations captured during interviews. The responses were to a specific question asked: *What are your plans for the future?*

Table 11: Future aspirations

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Response</i>
<i>Hungwe</i>	<i>I want to sort myself out. I would like to set my own small business of buying and selling mobile phones. I am planning to go back to South Africa to look for a job and after months I would be able to start my own small business. By the Grace of God, I think I will one day make it life.</i>
<i>Mandava</i>	<i>I want to go back home. If I manage to raise enough money for bus fare I will go.</i>

<i>Mabree</i>	<i>If I get money I will go home, at the moment my brother's wife is not at home. The last time I left home because there was hunger. I asked for food from neighbours. I was taking my medication.</i>
<i>Bushu</i>	<i>I would like to be a boiler maker. I need to go back to school. If I get a chance I would start in Grade 5. No one wants to die a pauper. I want to change my lifestyle...</i>
<i>Godlwayo</i>	<i>I want to go school and start in Grade 7 up to Form 2 and at that stage I would know what life is all about.</i>
<i>Mvuthu</i>	<i>I want to join the army after completing my education. We are taught social skills and I hope that after completing my education the training centre will help me look for work.</i>
<i>Njiva</i>	<i>I can't go home because my mother beats me up with a belt</i>
<i>Thumi</i>	<i>I want to go back to school.</i>

<i>Jambezi</i>	<i>I would like to obtain an identity card and look for a job. I wish to drive a car; I wish to use a pen as well. The problem is that I am not educated, you see. The most important thing I want is to get work, any type of job would do,</i>
<i>Madobha</i>	<i>I would ask the people here at Scripture to send me to Trenance so that I can attend school there.</i>
<i>Biggy</i>	<i>I would like to be a policeman.</i>
<i>Hona Mwana Wako</i>	<i>I would like to be a nurse....Maybe I will have to go to school. I did not complete my secondary school education.</i>
<i>Mshona</i>	<i>As I grow much older I will see what life brings up in terms of opportunities. I will look for a job and get settled here in the city. May be I will go home for a while but ultimately come back to see if I can strike some luck. I may live in the alleys before I get my own accommodation.</i>
<i>Makumbo</i>	<i>I would like to go back home</i>

<i>Sabhabha</i>	<i>I would like to go back to school</i>
<i>Nduna</i>	<i>I want to be a boiler maker</i>
<i>Mafana</i>	<i>I would like to find work and earn money for a living</i>
<i>Windi</i>	<i>I will try to find a job and go home as long as my grandmother is away in the rural areas.</i>
<i>Mukoma</i>	<i>I will stay here on the streets</i>

The responses vary according to age with the younger street children expressing a wish to go back to school while the older street children tend to think about the immediate future in terms of securing employment or a qualification which would enhance their chances of securing a job. Hungwe's response was probably based on his experiences of venturing into the Marange diamond rush of 2008 in Eastern Zimbabwe characterised by illegal diamond panning as well as his forays across the border into South Africa. Hungwe had just returned from South Africa and his hands bore marks of digging or performing manual jobs. His sentiments were laced with the toughness he has built over years from his early childhood while growing up in Mbare, one of the toughest areas of Harare. One such experience he shared during interview was digging a swimming pool (3 metres long and 2 metres deep) in Pretoria and completing it in one day and getting paid R2000 with a colleague. It was no surprise that in August 2013 Hungwe was reported to have left Bulawayo for South Africa. On reflection his expressed wish of going to America could be

seen as a realistic expression of ambition and drive having crossed the border to neighbouring South Africa on many an occasion without a passport.

Some of the street children aspire to lead better lives even if this remains a distant dream. For example, Mvuthu said: *‘I want to join the army after completing my education. There is a lot that we do here apart from going to school. We are taught social skills. We are taught and encouraged to develop good moral values such as respecting adults and attending school every day. I hope that after completing my education the training centre will help me look for work. If I get a job I will assist the centre. There are many opportunities here; one can be a leader at the Centre like one of the guys, that one who looks older than the rest of us’* (pointing to a young man who appeared to be in his early 20s).

This dream appeared to be something important to Mvuthu. However, in reality he may not realise his worthwhile dream owing to his age. At the age of 17, he was only in Grade Five (primary school) and it would be difficult for him to access secondary education post 18 years unless special dispensation is exercised by Thuthuka Street Children Project in order for him to remain at the half-house.

Others like Jambezi lacked a lot of essential things such as identity documents and was illiterate. Jambezi said: *‘I would like to obtain an identity card and look for a job. I want to tell you the truth; I am not a naughty person or a thief. You see, when I lived in the rural areas I was naughty but not in any extreme way. I want to work and get money. I wish to drive a car; I wish to use a pen as well. The problem is that I am not educated, you see. The most important thing I want is to get work, any type of job would do, I wouldn’t mind’*.

Lack of basic education was a big problem for Jambezi and he seemed to realise he stood a slim chance of even getting a manual job. Jambezi was approaching the age where

having an identity card was a must for any job prospects. He was in a predicament as the only people who could help him to obtain identity documents were not willing to assist.

It was interesting to hear what a girl living on the street would like to be. Hona Mwana Wako said *'I would like to be a nurse.... Maybe I will have to go to school. I did not complete my secondary school education'*. Again she identified lack of education as a probable impediment to her aspirations. Hona Mwana Wako was vulnerable and appeared to be in an exploitative relationship with one of the homeless youths whom she called 'daddy'. She even joked that she was carrying his baby.

Bushu, one of the youngest boys on the street provided a very insightful comment about what he would like to do in the future when he said *'I would like to be a boiler maker. I need to go back to school. If I get a chance I would start in Grade Five. No one wants to die a pauper. I want to change my lifestyle....'*. Upon checking at Thuthuka Street Children Project in August 2013 what became of Bushu, it turned out he left with a group of boys for South Africa. Bushu had been to South Africa before and talked about the good facilities in children's homes in Polokwane which he decided to leave for life on the streets.

There were also others who thought about going back home. For example, Mabree said *'If I get money I will go home. At the moment my brother's wife is not at home. The last time I left home was because there was hunger. I asked for food from neighbours. I was taking my medication'*. This never materialised as she was still living on the streets more than a year later and Mabree had four young girls whom she introduced to low level prostitution.

Similarly Mandava said in 2011:

'I want to go back home. If I manage to raise enough money for bus fare I will go'. Again this never materialised as in August 2013 I was informed by other street children that he had been to South Africa and was operating between Bulawayo and Gweru, making

money walking on stilts on the streets- a trade that he starting doing in 2008 in South Africa.

In some cases returning home was an option such as the experience of the period close to Christmas in 2011 when a sizeable number of street children returned home after getting bus fares from their benefactors like *Blazi* weToyota. However, some of them, particularly the older street children, may not be able to leave street life because of the time they had spent living on the streets. I took stock of who was still living on the streets in August 2013 and found that almost half of the boys who were living on the streets in 2011/2012 were still there. There seems to be credence in thinking that an entrenched familiarity with life on the streets makes it difficult for the older street children to think of leading a different life. There is a tendency for street children to move from one town or city to another especially when they get into trouble. One typical example was Madala (who came onto the streets aged six in 2003) who was reported to have left the city for Harare and then for South Africa to run away from rape charges of a girl from the streets.

Notwithstanding the above, there were reports at Thuthuka Street Children Project of former street children who abandoned life on the streets for education and two qualified for university. In 2011 there were a number of former street children who had completed O'Level and A' levels. Others were on the Bulawayo City Council skills training programmes (welding and motor mechanics). This would suggest that given the chance some street children are capable of achieving their dreams.

7.10 Street children's perceptions of life on the streets

One method used to tease out street children's perceptions about their lives on the street was 'My Space' (see Appendix Five) where participants were asked to '*write or draw anything about yourself or life on the streets*'. The participants were chosen at random on different days during their free time at Thuthuka Contact Centre. In total six children (all

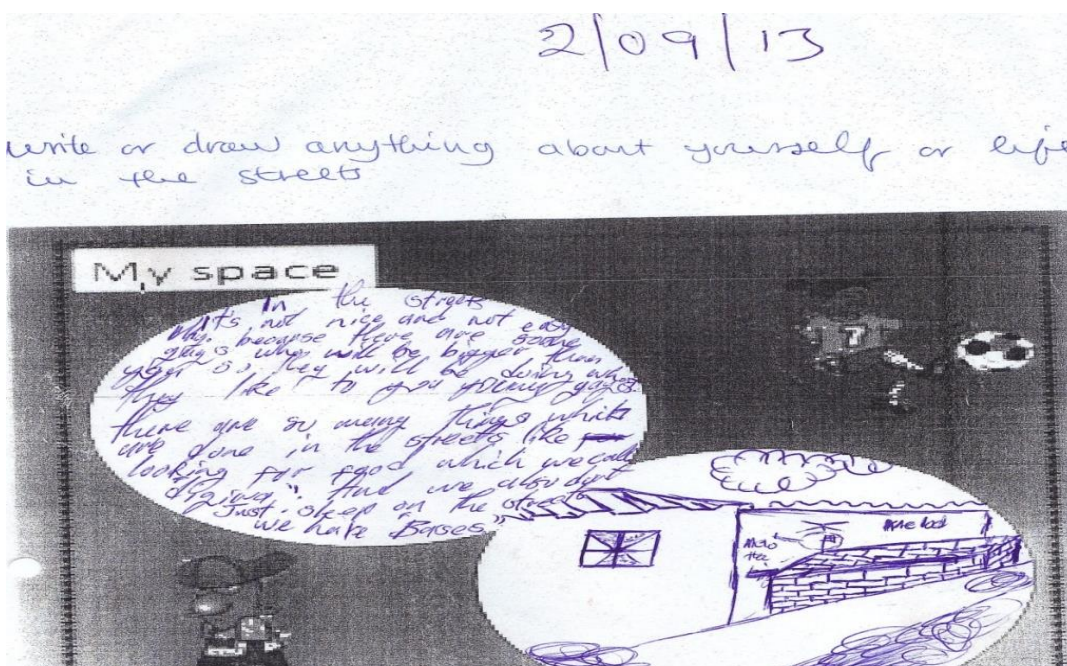
boys) took part where they were issued with a pen and paper with three circles (blank) to write or draw anything relating to their life on the streets. I chose four of the drawings to illustrate how they viewed their lives on the streets and the other two were statements about the reasons why they left home for the streets (these were similar to reasons given by many street children in the demographics section).

The following drawings were a result of the exercise.

Lebhu wrote on 'My Space':

'In the streets it's not nice and not easy. Why? Because there are some guys who will be bigger than you so they will be doing what they like to young guys...'

Figure: 25



Source: Lebhu on My Space

This statement suggests that young street children are bullied on the streets by older boys.

This was not an isolated experience as a number of younger boys reported similar experiences. For example, Njiva remarked in December 2011 that it had become congested and difficult on the streets, becoming like home and cited bullying by one of the older boys. When asked about how he found life on the streets, Bushu (the youngest of the street

children) remarked that: *'It's boring. There are nasty people on the streets. A lot of times you get bullied by older boys. They send us on errands even when you are tired and if you resist you can even be beaten up'*.

Biggy drew a picture about his experiences on the streets depicting a street child reflecting on life at home which he referred to as *'Then'* and referred to his current circumstance as *'Now'*.

Figure 26. "Then and Now"



Source: Biggy's drawing (29/08/13)

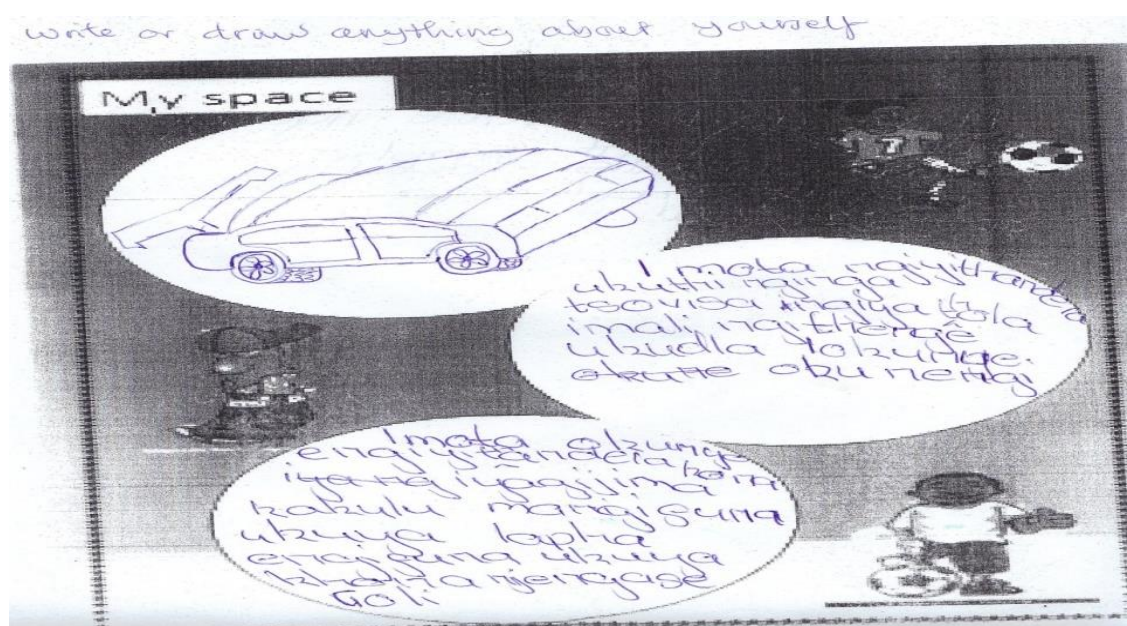
In the picture Biggy says living on the streets is better than home. He paints a picture of abuse in the home by a carer which was a common reason for many children to leave home. The second part of the drawing shows what he finds on the street including digging for food near a supermarket. It is interesting to note that his drawing is located in time with a sign of an election poster (Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government elections were held in July 2013) on a tree. In the drawing Biggy captures the *'Now'* where a street child is introduced to glue, weed, cigarettes and other harmful drugs. The final part of the

drawing shows street children sharing glue. He further makes a comment that *'this is not good for my health but I can't stop'*.

The overall story told in this picture is of a street child's journey onto the streets and how new habits and practices are picked up while living on the streets. Once adopted it becomes difficult to stop. It is interesting to note that politics dominated the urban landscape in the form of posters on trees. Two bold street children joined the *'political train'* following ZANU-PF's landslide victory in the election at the end of July 2013. On the 21st August 2013 two street boys took advantage of free transport ferrying supporters to Harare for a National Hero's burial at the National Heroes Acre. There was evidence that they did indeed go to Harare and one of the boys was wearing a ZANU-PF campaign t-shirt distributed to those who travelled. For the boys this was a joy ride and a chance to check out how things were in Harare.

Madobha's picture has cars and he talks about where he would like to go if he had a car. He says he would go to *eGoli* (Johannesburg). It is no surprise that a lot of street children in Bulawayo join the exodus to South Africa in search of a better life.

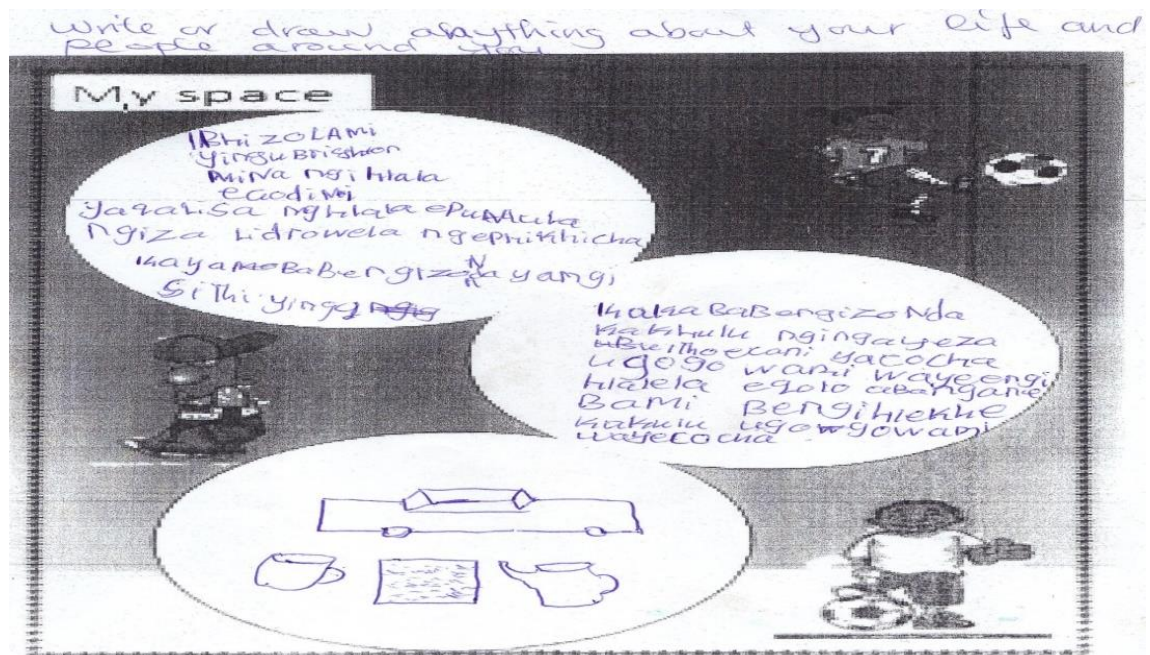
Figure 27. Madobha's wishes



Source: Madobha's drawing (28/08/13)

In his space Pumula talks about where he sleeps on the streets and that he goes around shining wheels for motorists in town for a small fee. He also mentions his difficult relationship with his grandmother, which he claimed was what caused him to leave home for the streets.

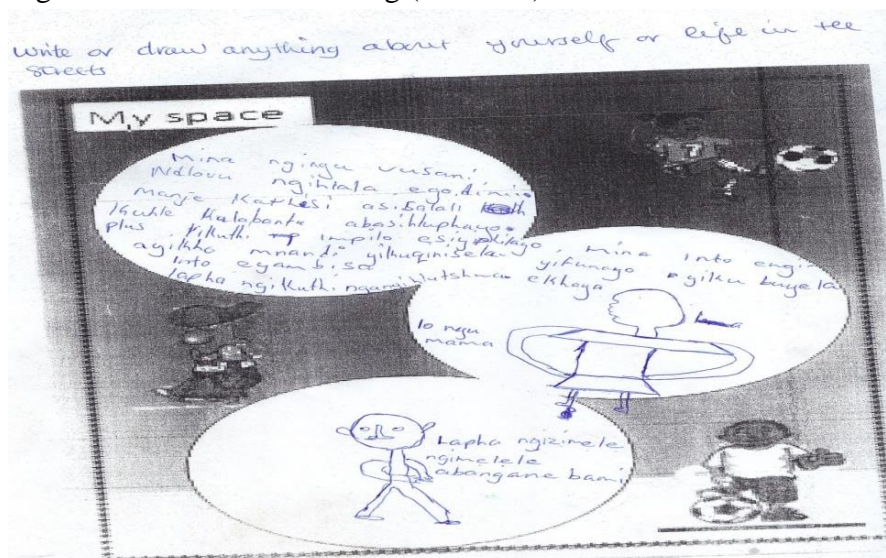
Figure 28: Pumula on My Space



Source: Pumula's drawing (28/08/13)

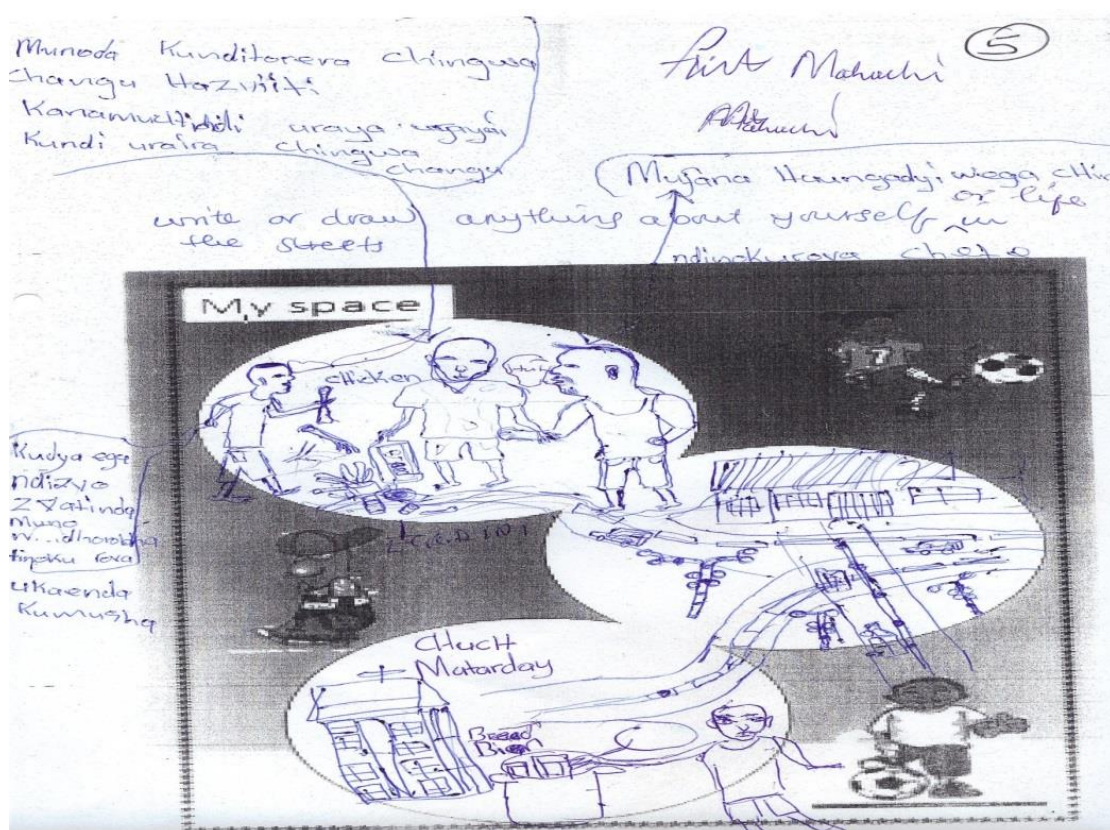
Mavuvu wrote on 'My Space', *'I am Mavuvu. I live at Egodini. This time we are not sleeping well because they are people troubling us. The life we are leading is not nice but we just have to endure. What brought me onto the streets was abuse at home. All I want now is to go back home'*.

Figure 29: Mavuvu's drawing (28/08/13)



In this extract Mavuvu mentions specific difficulties associated with his group's base at night. He wrote this after a night of fighting at the base where a homeless man was stabbed and hospitalised. Most of the boys spent that afternoon sleeping at Thuthuka Contact Centre. Even when faced with insurmountable problems, street children have to endure, as they have very few options. He put his mother on the drawing as well as his own picture, waiting for his friends on the streets. The inclusion of his mother on the drawings and his wish to go back home suggest that he sees the street as temporary than his place in the home.

Figure 30: 'Let's share the *digira*'



Source: Mshona's drawing (28/08/13)

Mshona's drawing captures life experiences on the streets. His picture depicts a scenario where a street child refuses to share his piece of bread. He puts it in a form of a conversation where the other says, 'You can kill me if you want for my bread' while the

aggressor says, *'We do not like people who do not share here in town. We will beat you up until you leave for your rural home'* (This quote was translated from Shona to English).

This description is similar to experiences of many young street children who reported that they were bullied by older boys. Reference to *'we will beat you until you leave for your rural home'* comes from the fact that most of the children have a rural connection and it is common that any behaviour that does not conform to urban dictates is associated with being rural or backward.

7.11 Street children vs their peers living at home

A group of high or secondary school children led by the Junior Governor (Head of the Junior Parliament in Bulawayo) approached Thuthuka with a donation of food parcels and clothes to children living on the streets just before Christmas in 2011. The donations were handed over at Thuthuka Training Centre one afternoon. It was interesting to witness the unfolding dynamics between children living at home and attending school and street children. This was an opportunity to gain an insight into how the general public saw street children and what level of understanding exists among their home based and seemingly privileged peers.

I observed that the boys from the streets were nervous and edgy as they were not in their familiar environment. There were three boys who had been to the Training Centre before running back to the streets. What made matters worse was that the Junior Governor and his team were late and the boys complained to the Field Officer that they were hungry. When the Junior Governor and his team arrived they greeted the street children and tried to engage them in conversations about themselves. This request was not met with any takers. The group of street children did not even want to face the cameras and turned away when one of the children tried to take photographs. The street children had drinks and biscuits before they left for the city with transport provided by Thuthuka Contact Centre. They did

not talk about the event and it seemed as a non-event as they went back to their usual activities. It appeared to have been a waste of their time as they may have missed some opportunities to make money. It was apparent that, in order to engage with street children, there is a need to spend time with them and gain their trust. There was a marked difference between the home based children and street children in that the former were confident while the latter were tense and kept their distance.

7.12 Difficult circumstances

The stories of the lived experiences of street children in Bulawayo will not be complete without mention of how they think they are perceived by members of the public. During fieldwork I noted that members of the public did not pay much attention to street children as long as they did not cause any problems for residents especially shoppers or loitering around businesses. Seldom did members of the public stop to check on a street child lying on the veranda of a shop or another boy lying on a pavement at about 10.00 am probably experiencing the effects or withdrawal symptoms of glue.

The field visits were an eye opener as to how street children conduct themselves in the city centre as well as at their bases. For example, it was common for street children to sleep across the pavement in order to attract attention from members of the public. They seize the opportunity to tell their story which could lead to someone giving them something (money or buying them food to eat). Bushu used this technique to get food. One afternoon he came to the Contact Centre with a loaf of bread bought by a member of the public who found him sleeping in town. During the day all street children focus on getting food and they concentrate their efforts or activities around specific places that they would have identified as having a potential for begging for both food and money such as food outlets and supermarkets. One way or another they manage to get something by their methods of begging or other self-help activities across town.

One interesting encounter was with a Security Guard at a fruit and vegetable market across the road from Thuthuka Contact Centre who complained to the Field Officer that the boys were sniffing glue and being a nuisance to businesses along the road. His view was that they should be locked up in a secure place and the key thrown away. The security guard referred to them as 'Your boys' suggesting difference to any other children in the city. This suggests a lack of understanding of street children and one wonders whether such a view is shared by wider society.

Upon talking to some of the boys who operated outside the market directing cars into parking spaces, it was revealed that the security guard concerned often hits them. One of the boys threatened that they would one day retaliate by throwing bricks at the security guard. These sentiments confirmed a widely held view that street children tend to resist restrictions being placed on them by their immediate environment. Some restrictions may attract aggression from street children; hence they are feared and pitied in equal measure. Threatening aggression is one way of asserting themselves in contested street spaces and places. It is what the street or a particular place offers to street children that draws them and keeps them there. Street children make strategic assessments on how to access spaces and places which are of material and social value to them. The market place in question provided them with opportunities to ask for money or food from shoppers coming out of the market on the pretext that their presence deterred thieves from breaking into the cars parked outside.

Interviews with some of the street children shed light on what they think about the general public. For example, Jambezi said, *'You know, people here in Bulawayo, they wouldn't know where I live. But if you do not bath then people would look down upon you. Others may think you could be helpful'*. It is evident that Jambezi recognised that anonymity was essential and realised that a good presentation was very important as to how the public would perceive them. The appearance tells a lot about the individual and an attitude

towards that individual is built and so follows the nature of treatment they may receive, that is, either negative or positive. Mshona was of the same view when he said *'It is essential that we bath everyday otherwise we would risk being shunned because of the smell as a result of not bathing or washing clothes'*. This view cements the idea that unless one is presentable they run the risk of being on the margins. This is what Mandava said about life on the streets: *'It is not right. If you live on the streets you even get beaten for no reason, kicked by people passing when you are asleep at night. You get searched ... I wake up and find that I have been searched'*.

The above extract is indicative of how unsafe the streets are at night. It was intimated by street children that they usually fall asleep flat out due to sleeping late or under the influence of glue. It is during the night they find themselves at most risk. There was a true story doing the rounds about one of the boys who was raped at night by a homeless man who asked to sleep next to the boys. The boy is a heavy glue user and was taken advantage of by the homeless man while under the influence of glue. The street children apprehended the man and dragged him to the police station and he later appeared in court and was sent to prison for 20 years.

There were stories of sexual abuse by men on boys but the alleged victims were not forthcoming. The boys are not open about sexual abuse unless it happened to someone else. There were suspicions that a man across the road from the Contact Centre may have been sexually abusing some of the boys. The informant, Member, was observed coming out the premises where this man lived one afternoon. The man's modus operandi was to invite a group of boys for a drink and then isolate one of them at his place, watch a movie and then sexual abuse them. It was not possible or easy to verify the stories for reasons stated above. The Field Officer at Thuthuka was aware of the allegations and the police were alerted. There were also suspicions that well-to-do women picked up street children, paid them to have unprotected sex before letting them off onto the streets. It was alleged

that at one time a lot of the boys disappeared from the streets after being picked up by women who live in the flats around the city for the purpose of collecting semen believed to be useful in boosting businesses. These allegations could not be proven and street children never spoke about sensitive issues. Some of them did mention that prostitutes around the 'red light district' have a tendency to approach them and offering their services at a reduced rate. It was the case one evening that a group of boys congregating on the pavement outside Thuthuka told me that they had beaten up and chased away prostitutes who approached them offering their services for a fee.

There were also predators amongst street children. Two young boys disclosed that one of the older boys (Mabhatshi) was a problem and that he tried to kiss them or pin them down. This usually happened at Egodini base at night and some of the older boys stopped him from doing that. There were other stories about a former street child who lived at the Centenary Park who was being sexually abused by homeless men who lived with him. It is worth noting that younger street children are at great risk of sexual abuse as evidenced in the local newspaper story on 29 September 2014 when a man who abused four street children from Emkotweni was arrested and charged for sodomising them for days (Bulawayo24News, 29 September 2014). This appears to be the man who lived across the street from Thuthuka Street Children Project.

Street children who commit crimes are at risk of sexual abuse in prison especially those approaching 18 years as they could be sent to an adult remand prison or sent to serve prison sentences. For example, Nduna related his experience of prison life after he was arrested for stealing mobile phones from a shop by hiding inside the shop all night. Older prisoners propositioned him and he told them off and claimed to be a family man pointing out a friend who used to visit him on regular basis as his wife. The boy who was sexually abused at the Centenary Park was in prison at the same time as his abusers and it started in prison and continued outside prison.

As already stated earlier in the section on gender differences I found that girls faced different problems from boys such as pregnancies and being forced into prostitution by circumstances and even being abused by their male counterparts. This finding is similar to findings by Luchinni (1994) and Hecht (1998) in their studies of street children in Buenos Aires and North East Brazil respectively. Lucchini (1994:3) postulates that '*the survival strategies of the street girl are incompatible with the exercise of professional prostitution, in that they are members of an in-group whereas prostitutes (out group) do not share their daily lives like street girls*'. I found this to be true with the small number of girls living on the streets in Bulawayo in that they have their own small circle of friends and live together among a group of boys or adult homeless males (mainly former street children). It is apparent that running away from home can be liberating for some children but also that it may mean running into more trauma and abuse on the streets.

7.13 Summary of findings

The findings in the study show that the phenomenon of street children is complex and fluid as has been identified in studies around the globe. The street children in this study loosely fit the 'of the street' category, in that they did not go back home at the end of the day; in the sense of a place where they lived with parents or adult carers. It was, however, apparent that places occupied by street children are their homes. For example, they would talk about who they live with at the base- a place they identify with and from where they operate from as well as retire to at the end of the day. Living on the streets is about negotiating space with fellow street children, the public and authorities. Their places are private space within a public environment and they can impose restrictions or choose who to allow in and who to keep out.

It was not easy to determine the actual number of children living on the streets during the time spent carrying out the fieldwork and even Thuthuka Street Children's Project work on

estimates. The numbers quoted for Bulawayo have been estimates since the 1997 head count and the 2001 UNICEF study. It is reasonable to argue that during the fieldwork children living on the streets numbered just below 100. The majority of the children were boys in their teens and a very small number of girls also in their teens.

The gender differences were apparent in that girls tended to be visible at night and engaged in low level prostitution. They surfaced in public places in the city centre. Most of the girls were seen in the company of their boyfriends who are also street children or former street children (homeless youths). There appeared to be a bridge in age between the younger children (chronological age) and those above 18 as they still lived together as closely knit group. It was not easy to interview the girls because their boyfriends would not guarantee privacy and would instead provide information describing their relationships as very good such as was the case with Hona Mwana Wako. Girls were at risk of sexual exploitation by homeless youth as well as their male counterparts. Pregnancies have occurred and children have been born on the streets. There was one child born on the streets between 2011 and 2013 and the parents still lived on the streets. Sexually transmitted infections are prevalent as street children tend to follow the few girls on the streets.

The majority of the children originate from outside Bulawayo and the region of Matabeleland. Street children who had lived in Harare were attracted to Bulawayo because the number of street children and homeless people was considerably lower than Harare, where there is a fierce competition for food and space. The majority of the children were from the Midlands and easily travelled by road transport or train from Gweru, the Midlands Provincial capital, to Bulawayo. They tend to move as a group and impose themselves on others who may be less experienced in street life. The Shona language dominance was evident among street children, an indication of their origins from outside the region. Friendship networks were formed along language lines with a few exceptions like Mshona who lived with Ndebele speaking boys at Egodini.

Street children patrol the city environment during weekends and identify areas where they can stay or retire to at night. These areas can be in public places like Egodini or shop verandas. These places are chosen for strategic and logistical reasons such as privacy, warmth, safety at night and proximity to water sources. There were more than a dozen such sites around the city and some were in the city centre or on the outskirts (see Appendix Four). Some of the places are secluded and not easily accessible and that alone provides them with a sense of security and control over the space.

In their small groups they have a supportive network of street family and friends such as *Blazi weToyota* (although his real name and interest was never established). Even the street children did not know his name or where he lived. There was a general reluctance among street children to talk openly about the man except that he gave them money whenever they saw him in town. It was evident during the conversations and interviews that street children do not easily disclose sensitive information and if so it would be third party disclosures.

The majority of the children were orphans and reasons given for leaving home ranged from abuse by carers to adventurism. It was evident that the traditional support network was under strain as most of the children were looked after by grandparents, siblings and other relatives before they left home for the streets. In most of the accounts presented, the street children perceived themselves as victims and having no choice other than seeking relief on the streets. After going through the first day's experience of making connections with other street children already established on the streets and sleeping with no blankets, new arrivals learn quickly how to survive.

For some children testing and appraisal of the territory marks the transition into full time street life. Their accounts on the first day on the streets illuminated the new experiences and shed insight into how a street identity is acquired by a presence on the streets at the

time when other residents of the city retreat to their homes. Street children meet in this shared space and form links and friendships that go on to sustain their survival on the streets. Life on the streets depends on a collective effort and initiative. The prevailing circumstances on the streets are not kind to bystanders as revealed in the catch phrase used by one of the street children that hesitation would mean starving. In other words life on the street dictates the necessity to engage with individuals who share the same predicament. Adapting to street life is a matter of urgency for survival. Positioning oneself is the first step to negotiate space and place on the streets which become home (in their minds) without losing the concept of home in terms of their origins.

On their journey to the streets, children who end up living on the streets cross many social and moral boundaries and indeed physical boundaries. As in keeping with the Zimbabwean tradition, if asked about where they come from, most street children would tell you about their rural origin even if they have lived in the city. The majority of street children that I had a contact with had a rural home. As Hill (2003:91) puts it, *'Everyone comes from some other part of the country and works in town, but their parents and young brothers and sisters will stay in the rural areas'*. The rural connection is part of one's identity and plays an important role in many aspects of one's life such as establishing friendship and a support network on the streets.

Street children keep traditional practices of main-stream society such as visiting their rural homes during the festive season such as Christmas. Almost half of the children left Bulawayo a few days before Christmas 2011 for their rural homes or visiting relatives in other cities. A surprise was one of the youngest boys who claimed to have come from Mutare (eastern border city) came back after Christmas and said he had been staying with an aunt at a mine on the outskirts of Bulawayo. He never mentioned knowing anyone or having a close relative in Bulawayo. It is common practice that urban dwellers go home at Christmas and spend time with their families which is usually coined as going *'kumusha'*

in Shona or '*ukuya ekhaya*' in Ndebele (meaning going home). Home in this instance is one's place of origin in the rural areas as opposed to a place of residence in the city.

Most of the street children described the year 2008 as the worst year in their lives. This will probably go down for many Zimbabweans as the lowest point in their lives. The country experienced unprecedented food shortages due the collapse of the economy. There is a tendency by many Zimbabweans to view as unpatriotic anyone who questions how the issue of land has been handled. It remains debatable whether there were no other effective means to address this historical matter other than the course of action that still remains controversial in many circles within and outside Zimbabwe's borders. The actions taken, rightly or wrongly, have had far-reaching consequences for the ordinary people of Zimbabwe. Street children have not been spared the hardships faced by the country. This study provides accounts of life experiences of many street children some of whom joined the long trek to neighbouring South Africa.

Street children use their skills (sometimes manipulative) to survive and they are resilient even under hard conditions. For example, they crossed the border into South Africa by asking for permission from border security guards to go across to the South African side to collect empty plastic bottles left by travellers for re-sale in Zimbabwe. Initially, they would return and gain the trust of the security details but over time they would go further in land as far as Johannesburg. Many of the children go on to live on the streets in cities like Musina, Polokwane, Pretoria and Johannesburg in South Africa.

Hill (2003) recounts first-hand experience of how Zimbabweans cross the border into South Africa with ease using illegal entry points. Crossing the Limpopo River is a very dangerous adventure particularly during the rainy season as the river is crocodile infested. Desperate people are not deterred by the crocodiles or the electric fence on the South African side. Bushu claimed that he saw crocodiles on one side of the bridge and a hippo

on the other on one of his trips across to South African side of the border. Those who can afford would either bribe border officials on both sides of the border or pay security units patrolling the border on both sides. Street children recounted similar experiences. They easily join the multitudes that use illegal entry points at night with the help of people smugglers known as '*Magumaguma*'. The return journey is much easier than the journey to South Africa as many would present at the immigration at the border post and would be treated as 'Good riddance' and given free passage. Going to South Africa is a long tradition in Matebeleland partly due to the Ndebele origins, common culture and language which makes it easy for the Ndebele from Zimbabwe to fit into the South African environment. However, it has now become an adventure for street children seeking better livelihoods across the borders.

Street children have aspirations similar to young people of their age. Most of the street children I saw and spoke to during the field visits would like to have a different life and be successful. There was evidence from Thuthuka Training Centre that some street children can achieve their potential if afforded opportunities to do so and even go to university. Street children see themselves as being on the streets for a short period and hope that they will turn around their lives.

It can be argued that street children are nobody's concern until something comes to light and authorities spring into action, usually by implementing removal strategies which have in the past inflicted misery than giving assistance to the needy children in society. They are perceived as a public nuisance and treated with contempt as in the case of a security guard across the street from Thuthuka Contact Centre. Street children tend to resist attempts to exclude them from sources of food and income. Being a street child is a unique childhood experience hidden to the public in general as street children are usually seen from a distance due to their marginal identities.

The literature review shows that street children do not construct their own images rather they are constructed by others in a manner that appeals to public prejudice which in turn legitimises the punitive government policy and approach to the phenomenon of street children. The findings of this study reveal the lived experiences of street children in a metropolitan city whose infrastructure and capacity to provide services to its residents is under strain. Bulawayo was a leader in the initial initiatives to tackle the phenomenon of street children. Only Thuthuka has remained committed to the cause of children living on the streets. Street children in this study are a sizeable population group who have rights to protection. This calls for a strong campaign for their voice to be heard at local and national level. Their full life story remains to be told.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The literature demonstrates that childhood is a social construction created and continuously affected by many contextual factors (Shanahan, 2007). Equally, street children are also a social construction in which they play a part and, therefore, the phenomenon of street children cannot be fully understood without studying the children themselves. If identities are one ‘mechanism of capture’, then space or place may be another. Indeed identity is often a product of place and space and being identified by virtue of place is clearly a factor in the identities of street children. The concept of ‘*heterotopic spaces*’ (Foucault 1989) assists further to capture the contested and inverted environment that is the defining object of ‘street identity’. Foucault (1967:3, translated by Jay Miskowiec, 1984) states that ‘*we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things*’. This was true in relation to street children’s lived experiences which were characterised by fluidity in terms of movement and interactions with their immediate environment.

The ethnographic material produced in this study illustrates the existence of street children amid adversity and hardships on a daily basis. The study highlights their everyday experiences on the streets of Bulawayo. Based on the assumption that the social world is constructed by the people, in this case street children, who live in it and through their interactions (Sarantakos, 2005), it was possible to gain an understanding of their experiences (Dennis *et al*, 2008). Street children’s lives are characterised by a continuous and relentless search for survival and the development of survival strategies. To the uninitiated street children may appear as if they are moving around aimlessly but in reality there is a lot of strategy in their movements as they target spots where they are likely to get money or food at particular times of the day or days of the week. This fluidity makes it difficult to engage them when they go about their various activities.

Street children's lives in Bulawayo would appear to have similarities with the lives of the urban poor in apartheid South Africa. Murray (2009:169) sums up the position of the urban poor (of whom street children are a significant part of) by stating that '*For those forced to live in the chronic state of abandonment, the crisis of everyday life finds material expression in the urban landscape: in its broken-down infrastructure, in its restricted opportunities... in its ruin and decay, and its excess of uncertainty, violence and danger*'.

Street children in Bulawayo depict their places and living space as hostile places.

Therefore, any research with street children should pay attention to the dangerous environment in which they live, the polluted grounds and water streams - across Madala's base and Ngatshangatsha Base in this study, open air sewers and garbage filled sidewalks in the city of Bulawayo.

From interviews of street children, participant observations, field visits and other material gathered during fieldwork, a picture emerges of street children living on the streets of a metropolitan city of Bulawayo, in a country torn apart by its violent past, its present circumstances and an uncertain future. The recorded interviews of street children recounted their individual journeys from home to the streets and their continued stay on the streets, following a similar pattern on a daily basis of seeking to survive in money dominated environment. Their origins are indicative of their ability to move across great geographical distances and adapt to changing conditions and environment to suit their needs (Van Blerk and Ansell, 2006). It is evident from their individual accounts that their existence or presence on the streets is a symptom of problems at the source, that is, their individual families, which have failed to provide the emotional and practical support that they may need due to unfavourable circumstances. As indicated in Table 7 (of the thesis) the majority of street children cited ill-treatment at home and orphanage as the main cause of them choosing to leave home to join the ever increasing group of children living on the streets in many cities around Zimbabwe. Not all were 'victims' of problems at home. There

was a minority who had come for a sense of adventure or because they had stolen from their family.

Their stories depict hardships experienced in a family or home environment and the ultimate decision to seek independent 'life' away from parental or adult control. Their stories are suggestive of an unquestioned determination to confront the 'unknown' world outside the routines of family life and gain freedom from the abuse or hardship that led them to leave home in the first place. For each of the children interviewed during the fieldwork, the push factors towards starting life on the streets appear to have been greater than the pull factors. For most of the children, deprivation and ill-treatment left them with no choice but to seek life chances in the streets only to find the streets harsh but equally difficult to turn back to problems-riddled family life they left behind.

The street children's experiences bear testimony to the enormous hardships that they encounter in the streets. Street children unanimously said life in the streets is difficult and to survive one has to be equally astute and compete for opportunities to get food and money. The introduction or initiation into life on the streets can be fast and any delay or hesitation in putting yourself up for the scramble for survival may mean you will not find food or other means of survival.

This study presented street children's individual journeys on to the streets. These journeys involve crossing social, moral and physical boundaries. The street children's world is complicated in that it comprises the past, the present and the future. The past is characterised by the push factors that led them to leave home and the present is where I met them. The present is central to who they are and who they want to be in the future. The present was characterised by the daily struggle to survive and the future is where they thought they ought to be in their lives. One may characterize the future as their 'dreamland'. The majority of the street children in this study wish to be successful in life

and live with the hope that they will elevate themselves from their circumstances. The experience with participants in this research is that the chances of achieving their dreams are dependent on a change of circumstances or by leaving the streets. Many street children valued education which they saw as a gateway to a better future. This was true also for some of their counterparts who were accommodated at Thuthuka Training Centre.

Time and again street children tell themselves that one day they will be done with the street, that they will go back home and go back to school or maybe get a job and be satisfied with little or less adventure. Evidentially, from the Bulawayo experience, something seems to hold them back from declaring once and for all that the street corners will be their place in the world. Street children seem to believe that they are yet to make something of themselves and live with the hope that something good will come out for them. They arrive in the streets with hope that they will be taking control of their lives (which to some extent they do), be free from structure and routines of the home where they bow to adult driven instructions. Butler (2009:26) provides a framework under which *'the journey occurs within the force-field of two opposing forces-the home or community and the street-each attracting or repelling the child according to the degree the child's needs are fulfilled within each space'*. It would appear that street children look elsewhere for that sense of freedom and for fulfilment of their needs.

The length of time some of the street children have spent living on the streets is indicative of a long standing phenomenon which refuses to go away as new waves of children continue to come to the street. There is a strong argument for services to be provided to street children during the time they are on the streets in order to ensure that they have at least the minimum protection. Overall, life in the streets is very fragile and precarious such as demonstrated by the experiences of street children involved in this study. James et al (1998:47) see the city as creating a *'new set of parameters in relation to the child...a great public place yet it is mapped fleetingly by private spaces and unpredicted geographies of*

power'. It seems acceptable that that is how life can be for some children while the rest of society continues with their lives. The story of their lives remains to be told and more attention paid to develop child-centred models of intervention which would also involve their families of origin without necessarily resorting to removing them from the streets which has for many years failed to achieve positive results. Street children need a platform to speak out for themselves so that perhaps society and the media may come to realise their worth rather than view them as a threat to society or a group of mischievous young people. There is a strong argument for the development of child-centred models in relation to practice as well as future research on street children.

8.2 Implications for policy and practice

Literature on street children from around the world suggests that the Latin American model of a 'street child' is dominant and the most common used definition of street children is derived from the early work on street children in Brazil and other Latin American countries. The Latin American model is associated with a largely negative perception of street children often seen as antisocial, amoral and impossible to rehabilitate (Ennew, 2004). In addition, street children tend to be regarded with fear and pity and they constantly attract negative headlines in local newspapers while their real life stories remain untold. Literature on street children emanating from the continent of Africa reveals no overall theoretical models or debates common to all writing on street children (Ennew, 2004). Ennew laments the lack of alternative approaches to the Latin American model of street children. Dallape (1988) suggests that there is a need to study the community first to determine which method will be suited to a particular African situation. Ruzzini (1996) talks of journalistic insights from Bogota from the work of UNICEF and Childhope (a Non-Governmental Organisation) where a new image of a street child emerges as a 'strong and astute being' despite being vulnerable to exploitation, being poor and oppressed. The street child is presented as a surviving hero from whom there is something to learn.

The Latin American image of street children is still dominant in Zimbabwe as demonstrated by brutal removals from the streets (Bourdillon, 1994; Marima *et al*, 1995) and repeated on a large scale in 2005 under Operation *Murambatsvina* (Operation Cleanup) where street children have fallen victim to the state's agenda to clean up the streets (Tibaijuka, 2005). This appears to be the preferred strategy as suggested in the article in the local Bulawayo newspaper in November 2014 where street children found themselves rounded up and dumped at a refuse site on the outskirts of the city. Wakatama (2007) argues that there is an over reliance on practice models developed or derived from these studies conducted in Latin America. This, coupled with Ennew's (2003) critique of the over utilisation of the Latin American model of street children suggests the need to develop an 'African child -centred model'. There is scope for research approaches and practices which are child-centred and flexible enough to adjust to the conditions on the ground. Knowledge and a good understanding of the research site and of the participants made it possible in this study to develop and establish a research oriented relationship with participants which was capable of turning out rich data. In other words research with street children requires a methodology that is sensitive to the agency of children.

In the area of practice it is a necessity to look at alternative approaches rather than rely on interventions (such as forced removals) which have proved ineffective for many years in many parts of the world. Street children are part of the social fabric of modern society and cannot be wished away. There is a need for society to accept that street children are a 'new community' that we have to live with rather than shun them or view them as a nuisance. While the community binds them as vagabonds, on the contrary, street children in Bulawayo are in touch with what happens around them. For example, a sizeable number migrate to South Africa in search of better opportunities like many citizens of Zimbabwe who have crossed the border in pursuit of better job prospects.

This study provides an insight into street children's lives in Bulawayo and these experiences may not necessarily be unique to Bulawayo. For example, some street children have moved into neighbouring South Africa to continue to live on the streets. They use the experience they have from Bulawayo and other places to survive in a foreign land. Efforts to eradicate the phenomenon from the streets in many parts of the world have not been successful and there is no end in sight. In view of the above, there is, therefore a need to develop a child-centred model or interventions based on the people's traditions, cultural beliefs and norms from which street children may be understood, which, one of the major concerns of this study is.

While it is reasonable to argue that there is no one answer to how the phenomenon of street children can be resolved, it is equally helpful to point out there are messages to draw from this research. The street children in this study showed resilience and that they were 'street survivors' with their future aspirations that can be enhanced to make them achievable. In their research findings on children on the streets of Britain, Rees et al (1994) presented a model of intervention along the lines of primary (such as education in schools), secondary (mediation between parents and street children) and tertiary interventions (focusing on skills training). This model bears resemblance to the Reach Model (Railway Children, 2012) which places emphasis on interventions at various levels such as on the streets, community and government, that is, during and after they run away to live on the streets. In other words, interventions for street children need to branch out and reach deeper as suggested by Browne (2014). Some of the above could be adapted to the street children in Bulawayo.

The literature suggests that the extended family support system in Zimbabwe has been weakened by a number of factors including HIV/AIDS and the declining economic conditions. The situation calls for a diverse approach to the phenomenon of street children in an environment where financial resources are scarce. A street level intervention aimed at

meeting immediate needs of street children when there are on the streets could include such aspects as gaining their trust which is demonstrated in this study and gaining an understanding of their social world as well as providing a place of safety while they ponder their long term plans for the future.

Developing a pool of volunteers and outreach workers to work with street children could be one way of addressing the scarcity of financial resources. This would work along the lines of the Community-Based Care for people living with HIV/AIDS (Rodlach and Dlodlo, 2011). Community-Based Caregivers served as a link between the public health care system and people living with HIV/AIDS. In a similar way volunteers could provide a link between the mainstream Social Services provider, street children, their families and other stakeholders. Rodlach and Dlodlo (2014) argue that volunteers tend to regard their care for people living with HIV/AIDS as ‘social capital’ as propounded by Bourdieu (1986) in that this can lead to local influence. The growth of such groups could result in numbers of street children going down as they would be sign-posted to various exit points. It is important to point out that such groups would need financial support from the government rather to rely solely on Non-Governmental Organisations and community resources. For example, this level of intervention would work with outreach activities involving families of origin with a view to help and support street children to resolve the issues that led to them leaving home for the streets and facilitate reunions where possible. The viability of such an approach is supported by evidence from Thuthuka Street Children Project who managed about a dozen reunions under a UNICEF sponsored programme with only one relapse in the first six months of 2013.

In the area of helping street children on the streets, volunteers and outreach workers can be trained in child welfare and child protection including identification of risk. This study demonstrated that trust from street children is essential for their engagement while consistency and a daily presence makes them more cooperative and open about what goes

on around their street community. It could be through such interventions that sexual exploitation, which was one of the major concerns raised in this study, could be tackled. Unlike the blind and disabled who have representation through their respective associations at various levels, street children have no one they report to or any representation. It should be acknowledged that street children have rights like those children who grow up in a home environment. The difference is that they refer to their childhood as having grown up on the streets. It is imperative that their needs are met while they are living on the streets. For example, street children need counselling services and organisations like Childline should avail their services such as a free phone line where street children can access counselling or report (anonymously) abuse on the streets.

Thuthuka Street Children Project follows what they call the ‘concerned approach’ which is aligned to the rehabilitation model. This is a more individualised rehabilitative programme with open access to the walk-in centre (herein referred to as the Contact Centre). The option for rehabilitation is an individual child’s choice when they make a decision that they want to leave the streets. The approach has worked in maintaining the link with street children and supporting those children who come through their gates with minimal services such as washing and bathing facilities and an odd meal. This approach goes some way in restoring some form of dignity for street children in that there is one place that they can identify with as ‘theirs’ in an environment where they are ignored by society and city authorities unless they do something that disturbs the order or business.

Strengthening and resourcing organisations like Thuthuka would ensure that there is a ‘semi-official eye’ on the streets. Thuthuka Street Children Project’s efforts are hindered by a serious lack of resources. This could be extended to include an educational provision where street children interested in learning can be assisted to access some tuition when they come into the drop-in centre for bathing and washing their clothes. For example, it was evident from some of the descriptions and drawings about their lives on the street that

some of them were very good artists which can be encouraged and, for some, it could be an exit route from life on the streets. They need help to learn a skill in order to stand a chance of having a better future. A drive towards vocational training could target those unlikely to return to school due to their age. This aspect was evident in the responses relating to their future aspirations. Those young and willing to go back to school could do some schoolwork at the drop-in-centre. Providing informal education to children living on the streets could focus on disseminating information about sexual exploitation, HIV/AIDS, substance misuse and keep safe work to ensure that street children receive a reasonable level of safeguards while living on the streets. In this research, street children presented as a street based community with their own recognised norms and practices deserving a mention like other groups in society. Taping into the experiences of former street children could be a helpful initiative aimed at encouraging street children to take some positive steps to prepare for their future adult lives.

From a children's rights perspective, street children, like any other group of people, need a platform to speak out for themselves. Street children should have a safety net to support them when they are at their most vulnerable in the form of someone they can talk to when they need to talk or help. For example, one of the participants in this study, Hona Mwana Wako, had no one to talk to when she was suffering from a sexually transmitted infection. It was other street children who came to her rescue by giving her money or calling a taxi to take her to hospital to receive treatment.

Working with communities in raising awareness would complement efforts made at street level. Browne's (2014) Strengthening Families Approach could be adapted to street children with a view to prevent vulnerable children ending up as street children by focusing on meeting the essential needs of vulnerable children like orphans and those living in poverty. In this study orphanhood and poverty were highlighted as the major reasons for children leaving home to live on the streets. Essential needs that can be met at

family or community level include nutritional, educational and medical support and the development of strategies to guarantee the self-reliance of the family. For example, developing the family's capacity to provide its own food by allocating implements for farming for those living in rural areas and self-help projects in urban areas would help the vulnerable children to remain with families.

Community awareness can be achieved at various levels such as collaboration with organisations, both rural and urban based to reach out to vulnerable children and provide them with the support that they need. A glimpse of such an approach was the formation of the Bulawayo Task Force on Street Children in the late 1990s (although today it exists largely in name only due to lack of resources). The task force raised community awareness to the phenomenon of street children in Bulawayo. With the media as a partner with the task force it is possible to help change the negative image of street children by highlighting the issues that caused them to run away from home in the first place. Zimbabwe has a strong grassroots based approach to social problems and functioning structures at local government level down to the village level (the lowest level in communities) which need to include vulnerable children in their agenda in order to cater for the needs of children at risk of falling through the net.

Article 16.3 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human rights (1948) recognises that '*The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and state*'. In view of the above international principle I would argue for a need for change of policy at national policy level with strategies to support vulnerable children and their families before the children reach the streets and as well as when they are on the streets. While there are a number of policies and legislation in Zimbabwe that seek to provide for basic needs of vulnerable children like street children, they are hampered by economic challenges and gaps in implementation. In order to have an impact on the lives of street children, a commitment at national level with regards to

allocation of resources and prioritizing child welfare and child protection is necessary. National budget decisions have heavily supported Defence, Education and Health since independence leaving vulnerable children, like the street children to fend for themselves. It would be advantageous to adopt *'an advocacy role often focuses the attention of policy makers on the plight of marginalised groups in society, and inadequacies and inconsistencies in the delivery of social services'* (Kaseke, 1991:43).

A concerted effort is required at national government and local government level to concentrate resources where they can have the greatest effect. Perhaps the department with a responsibility for children's services needs to look at provisions for vulnerable children (including street children) and assume a protective outlook based on the principle of children's rights rather than the welfare model. Kaseke (1991:1) states that social work practice in Zimbabwe is curative in orientation and is *'seen primarily as an instrument of social control, and never seriously addressed itself to the root causes of social problems.'* This may be possible by revisiting the fundamental practice principle emphasised by Kaseke (1991:43) that *'the most common role is that of enabler or facilitator, enabling individuals and groups to achieve and sustain adequate social functioning and realise their potential'*. From my experience of engagement with street children during the fieldwork, I would argue that this principle is fundamental in working with street children.

It is evident that those interventions directed towards removal of street children have not made a great deal of difference as street children sooner rather than later return to roam the streets. This would suggest a lack of understanding of the problems and issues by those who make decisions that affect street children and until this is addressed the phenomenon of street children will always be with us for generations to come. A change of social and political attitude towards street children could help alleviate the plight of street children in Bulawayo. I would argue for intervention at the point of concern rather than at the point of crisis as in street children in Bulawayo we witness children and young people who have

experienced trauma both at home and also on the streets. A reach model could have the possible greatest impact as children would be met as early as possible and before they become involved and engrossed in street life as well as present them with opportunities to work towards an exit strategy. A strategy based on community change, policy change and system change is essential in order to build protective and promotive factors to safeguard street children.

8.3 Contribution to knowledge, policy, practice, and street children's lives

The study has offered an insight into the debates on street children and an understanding of the phenomenon of street children in Bulawayo from the street children's point of view. It has also provided an understanding of how they perceive their 'ascribed' identity of street children and their perceptions of their future aspirations. The better the understanding of what goes on out on the streets of Bulawayo (away from the public eye) the more possibility there is of designing interventions and formulating policies that would benefit street children in Bulawayo (and perhaps elsewhere).

It is evident from the extensive literature and from this study that current policy and practice in relation to street children is not effective in providing a service to street children in Bulawayo. The children I saw hardly receive a service from the responsible government department and only get minimum attention from Thuthuka Street Children Project. There is a need to mobilize the Bulawayo community to rise up and create support services for street children while they are on the streets. A lot is happening to street children which remain hidden from the authorities. This study partially covers what goes on a daily basis for street children but I hope it will contribute to the debate on street children in Bulawayo and lead to actions that will benefit street children as well as provide a helpful knowledge base on the phenomenon of street children.

8.4 Future research

More research is needed on the experiences of girls who live on the streets of Bulawayo. The limited data gathered on girls in this study suggest that they face greater difficulties than most of their male counterparts. Such research could provide evidence for helpful interventions that could promote resilience for girls living on the streets. A study of circumstances of former street children could shed light on what life is like after leaving the streets or what the future holds for street children. Such a study may throw some light as literature on consequences of child neglect has revealed. Street children are tomorrow's adults, parents and future leaders. The bigger question is what are the social costs of being a street child?

8.5 Final reflections

My experience from researching street children in Bulawayo is that ethnography offers rich opportunities to explore the life experiences of a group of children who live in small groups sharing a common identity (living on the streets) and making a living on the margins of society. Establishing a working relationship is the cornerstone of doing research with street children. They usually view an adult trying to engage them with some level of suspicion and show reluctance to talk about themselves in detail. There were challenges during the fieldwork such as accessing some of the places they occupy especially at night for safety reasons. One way around this was to ask street children to take me to some of those places. It is really hard to do research with street children but I developed a relationship with them and most of them would stop and talk to me.

Throughout the fieldwork I could not completely shake off my anxieties as a social worker and father figure that street children were not safe on the streets. Blommaert and Ding (2006:27) state that *'as a fieldworker, you never belong 'naturally' or 'normally' to the field you investigate; you are always a foreign body which causes ripples on the surface of smooth routinized processes'*. This is to say I was aware of the observer effect (Bourdieu,

2005). However, I managed to keep a distance while being an adult with an interest in their lives. At the end I had an understanding of their lives on the streets. I hope the Bulawayo experience can help others struggling with the issue of how to carry out research with street children or help them in vulnerable contexts at the time they make their passage through childhood into adulthood in a unique way. This experience can also help illuminate the challenging task of assisting those who have lost contact with families, friends and community.

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Appendices

Appendix One: Consent form

Project title: Life experiences of street children in Bulawayo: Developing a child-centred model

I have read and understood the information sheet.

Yes

No

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

Yes

No

I have had my questions answered satisfactorily.

Yes

No

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without having to give an explanation.

Yes

No

I agree to the interview being recorded and to its contents being used for research purposes.

Yes

No

I do not agree to being identified in this interview and in any subsequent publications or use. Where used my name must be removed and my comments made unattributable.

Yes

No

I agree to the transcripts (in line with conditions outlined above) being archived and used by other bona fide researchers.

Yes

No

I agree to my audiotapes (in line with conditions outlined above) being archived and used by other bona fide researchers.

Yes

No

I would like to see a copy of my transcript.

Yes

No

I would like my name acknowledged in the report and on the project web site (without linking it to content or quotation)

Yes

No

Material gathered during this research will be treated as confidential and securely stored.

Please answer each statement concerning the collection and use of the research data.

Name (printed) _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Feel free to contact me if you have any further questions.

The name of the main investigators, along with telephone and email contact details are: Ian Ndlovu, Telephone Nos: +441268451581 (Home): +447506715051 (mobile), email:ianmthombeni@hotmail.com

Appendix Two: Information Sheet

My name is Ian Ndlovu from the Open University, United Kingdom. I am doing a research on life experiences of street children in Bulawayo. I would like you to talk to me about your experiences and how the story of your life occurred.

If you would like to take part in this study I need to go through a set of procedures with you to fully explain the purpose of the study, the research process, the expectations (what is expected of you) and how your information will be used.

I would like to emphasise that you are free to not to take part in the study for any reason and you are free to withdraw from the study anytime for any reason or for no reason without any consequences.

All the information gathered will be used for the purpose of the study and any publication will be solely for the requirements of the study.

Your participation will be in the form of a recorded interview, making mental maps and depot maps of your day activities, drawings of places that you like to visit and places or things you do not like.

You will also be asked to take photographs of places that you visit and places that you spend time including activities of your choice. These will be discussed with you in order to get insight into your experiences on the streets of Bulawayo.

It is possible that some questions or activities that you may be asked to respond to or participate may make you feel uncomfortable or cause you to be upset. You are under no obligation to answer any question or take part in any activity that makes you uncomfortable. Should you feel unable to proceed for whatever reason the interview will be terminated and data gathered will only be used with your consent or otherwise discarded.

Participation in the study will be voluntary .No payment will be made for participating in the study although expenses would be considered where applicable. All data gathered will be treated and stored with the strictest confidence in electronic format and your personal details or information that might identify you will be anonymised.

Your name will recorded on a separate list to be kept locked away in a secure place only accessible to the researcher during the research process. No one else will be told your name or any research participant in this study. Your views may appear in a report in this research but will not be linked to you or individuals.

I will now answer any questions that you may have before asking you to sign a consent form and then I will start the research interview.

Appendix Three: Interview Schedule

Introduction

My name is Ian Ndlovu from the Open University, United Kingdom. I am doing a research on life experiences of street children in Bulawayo. I would like you to talk to me about your experiences and how the story of your life occurred.

The best way to do this would be to start from your birth, with the little child that you were, and then tell me all the things that happened one after the other until today. You can take your time in doing this, and also give details because for me everything is of interest that is important for you.

I have a set of questions which I would like to ask and I have a digital recorder which I will use to record our conversation which we will listen to after we have finished.

Name of child:

Date:

Venue /Location of interview:

Time started:

Time finished:

1. What is your name? Optional

2. Sex Male/Female

3. When you born/How old are you?

4. Where do you originally come from?

5. Are your parents alive?

Father Yes No

Mother Yes No

6. Whom did you live with before coming to live on the streets?

Father and Mother Mother only Father only Other (specify)

7. Do you have any siblings? Yes No. If yes where are they?

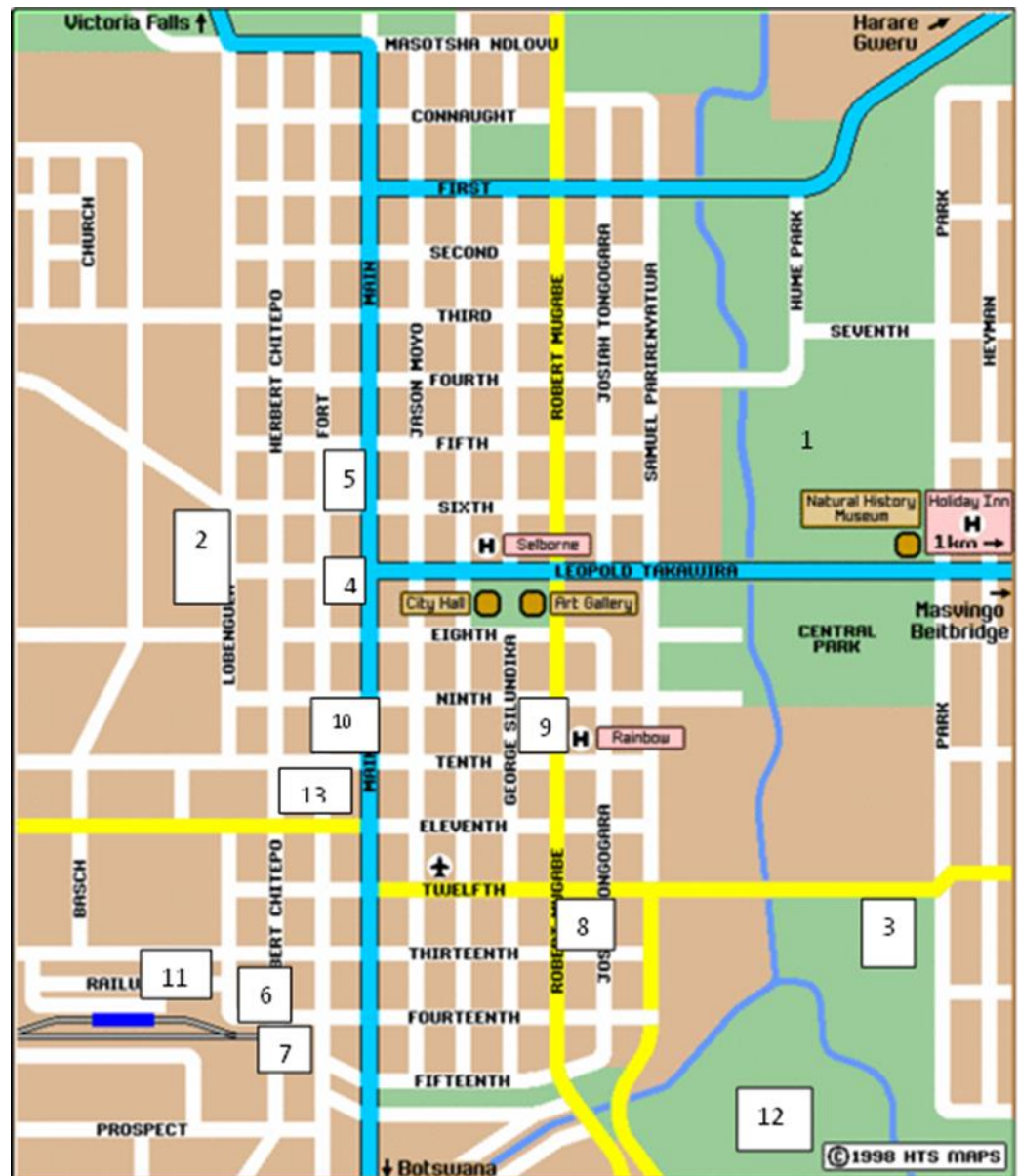
8. What does your parent (s) or guardian do?

9. How long have you been living away from home?
10. When did you first come to the streets?
11. How long have you been living on the streets of Bulawayo?
12. Why did you come to live on the streets?
13. Who do you live with on the streets?
14. Do you have contact with family/ relatives or friends who do not live on the streets?
15. When was your last contact with family members/ relatives or friends?
16. Have you been to school? Yes No
17. If you been to school, what grade and form when you left?
18. What were the reasons for leaving?
19. Have you ever been unwell on the streets?
20. If so, how do you get treatment?
21. How do you spend your time on the streets from the time you wake up to the time of going to sleep?
22. What activities do you engage in on the streets?
23. Where and how do you get your food?
24. Where do you sleep?
25. Tell me about your relationship with other children living on the streets?
26. Tell me how you feel about the general public?
27. Tell me how you think the general public feel about you?
28. Tell me about the problems that you face on the streets?
29. Who helps you and what kind of help do you get on the streets?
30. Have you ever been in trouble with the police? Yes/No
31. If yes, why were you in trouble?
32. Tell me about the whole experience.
33. What would you like to be or do when you grow up?
34. What would you like to happen to your life on the streets?
35. What kind of help would you like to get on the streets?

36. Is there anything you think I need to know which is important to you that I have not covered in my questions?

Thank you very much for talking to me.

Appendix Four: Bulawayo City Street Map (Research area)



Street Children's places

1. Bulawayo Centenary Park
2. Egodini Basch Street Terminus
3. Golf Course/ Trade Fair Grounds
4. Bulawayo Centre
5. Main Post Office
6. Bulawayo Railway Station (Sceptic tank- Home in the ground)
7. Ngatshangatsha (former base)
8. Thuthuka Contact/Drop-in Centre

9. Emkotweni (Alley)
10. TM Hyper
11. Railway Station base
12. Bradfield Shopping Centre
13. Waverley Bar and Hotel

Appendix Five: My Space

write or draw anything about yourself or life
on the streets

